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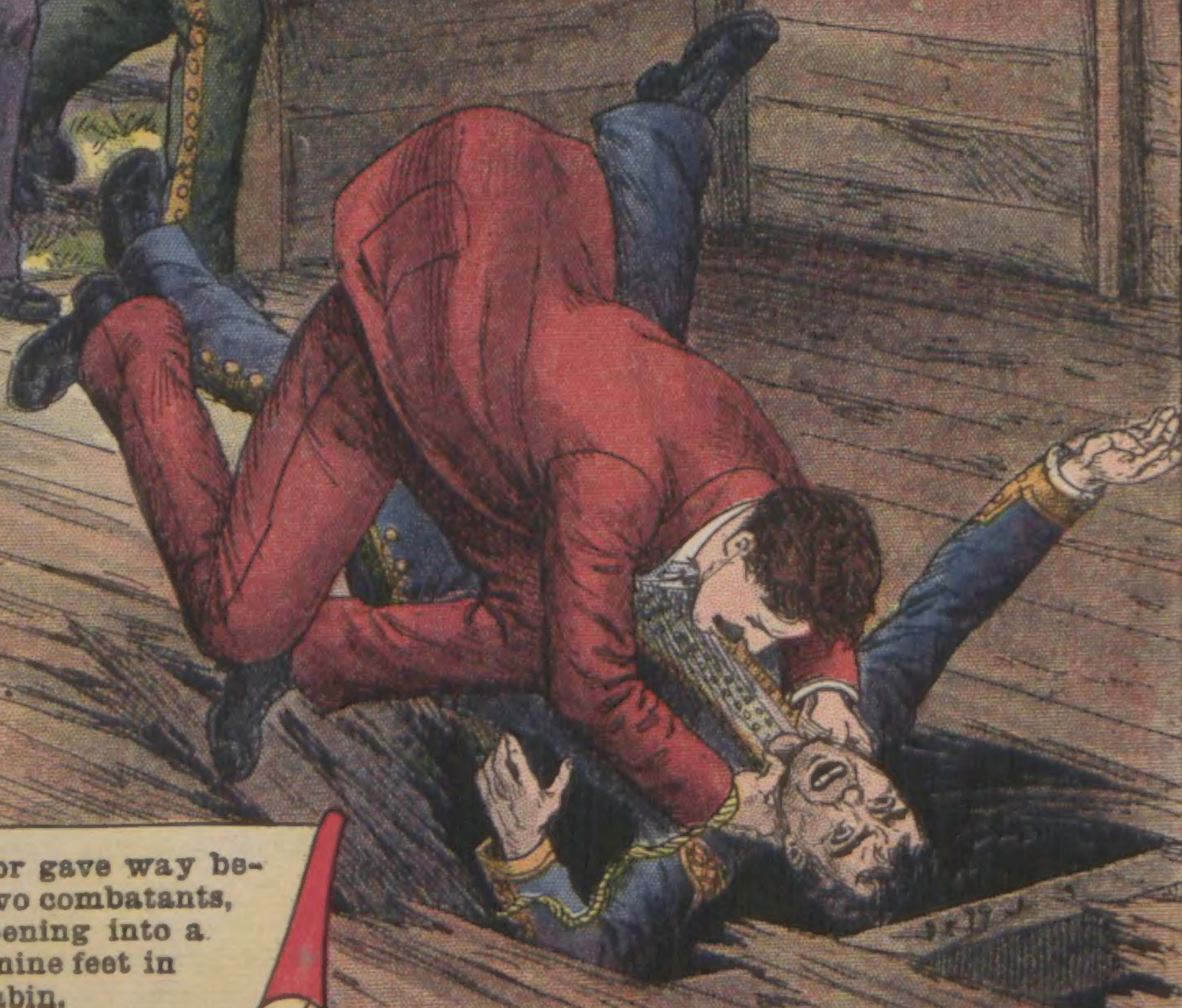
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PLUCK AND LUCK

THE PEARL PRINCE
OR, THE SHARK SLAYER'S SECRET.

By CAPT. THO'S H. WILSON.



The rotten boards of the floor gave way beneath the struggles of the two combatants, and they fell through the opening into a sort of cellar, some eight or nine feet in depth, that lay under the cabin.

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PLUCK AND LUCK

Stories of Adventure.

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The Pearl Prince

OR,

THE SHARK SLAYER'S SECRET

By CAPT. THOMAS H. WILSON

CHAPTER I.

THE MAD JAGUAR.

A thrilling scream rang out upon the air of a dense forest, situated not many miles from the coast in Lower California. The sun had made his appearance above the rugged line in the east that indicated the coast range, and after mounting to his meridian, was speeding toward his couch in the west.

At this point, the coast was of singular formation. The mountains that often swept down close to the very edge of the sea, in their course from north to south, had retreated from the water so that there were half a dozen miles almost between the ocean and the coast range, that stood up a barrier against the fury of the now mild Pacific, ages and ages ago.

This space was not exactly level, for it had a gradual ascent, besides ravines and small elevations. It was in many places covered with a dense forest.

Passing through this forest was a young man on horseback. He seemed to be aware of the desperate nature and evil reputation lonely places in this country had gained among travelers, for he was heavily armed.

When that loud scream, in a voice unmistakably a woman's, rang out through the forest, the rider suddenly brought his steed to a standstill.

There was no repetition, and after waiting a few seconds, and hearing it not, the horseman threw himself to the ground, cast the bridle over the stump of a black oak tree that had been blown down by some terrible wind, and then plunged into the forest.

At this point it could almost be called a chaparral, the small trees and bushes formed such a dense mass of vegetation, and the young man had some difficulty in forcing his way through in places.

Flowers of various hues could be seen among the long grass, and such was their marvelous beauty that a herbarian would have gone crazy with delight at sight of them.

Despite the obstacles to his progress the young man made rapid way through the forest. It took him but a couple of minutes to reach a place where the chaparral seemed to become open, and a glade was formed, that, in comparison with the trees around, resembled not a little an oasis in the desert or an island in mid-ocean.

The young traveler, however, had no time to indulge in any admiration of the scene, or speculations as to the why and wherefore of this glade's presence.

There was a startling tableau presented to his view, such as would have thrilled the nerves of almost any man to witness.

Through interstices in the branches the sunlight forced its way, seeming like golden spears of gigantic length traversing the air from the canopy beyond, to the ground.

The glade was some fifteen yards in diameter, and where the trees once more began a human figure was crouched amid the long grass.

At a glance it was easy to see that it was a young girl. Her black hair seemed to be crowned with a glorious halo as one of the golden bars descended upon it and her.

She was upon her knees, and as the grass had fallen by the action of the wind or some recent heavy rain, such as is peculiar to the climate of the country, the young man could readily see the scattered flowers in front of her, that proclaimed the object of the maiden in wandering to this lonely place.

Her hands were clasped and a look of mute agony could be plainly traced upon her face as she gazed into the branches of a tree almost above her.

The eyes of the traveler also sought this spot, and what he saw forced an exclamation of alarm from his lips.

A long animal was flattened out upon the lower limb of the tree, his great square head hanging down, with its glaring eyes glued upon the form of the young girl.

It was the terrible jaguar.

The traveler held in his hands an elegant rifle of the latest pattern. He saw the body of the fierce animal quivering, as though it was gathering its energies for a terrible leap, and from this he knew that there was no time to be lost.

The rifle leaped to his shoulder, and he glanced along the shining barrel. There was something about the animal that he did not understand, for no beast, unless mad, could have such a terribly fierce aspect.

However, there was no time to waste in speculations. In another instant the fierce animal would have leaped upon the alarmed young girl. She had recovered in a small degree from her terror, and in one hand she held a small dagger that was little better than a toy.

With that bravery for which Spanish women are noted in times of extreme peril, she would have defended her life with this, but the chances were as a thousand to one against her. Still, in the swift glance which the young man shot towards her, he could not but admire the bravery that would have made a last effort against such a horrible fate as death by the poisoned fangs of a maddened jaguar would prove to be.

The sharp report of the rifle awoke the echoes of the forest. Quickly following there came a terrible scream that drowned all else. Dropping his rifle, the young man drew his knife, and, with a few gigantic leaps, threw himself in front of the black-haired maiden.

There was no need of his ready blade, for his bullet had carried instant death to the fierce animal, which had fallen to the earth half way between the tree and the spot where the maiden crouched, carried hither by the momentum.

The young man breathed easier when he saw the fierce animal lying there, its body quivering in the last throes of death. He stooped over it, and saw that his suspicion was correct. The bloody froth in the corners of the brute's mouth was plain evidence of its madness.

He saw more.

Lifting up one of the animal's paws, he glanced at the claws, where something strange had attracted his attention. Uttering a little cry of amazement and horror, he lifted the paw, and smelled of the greenish substance with which the sharp claws seemed to be coated.

"Great Heaven!" he muttered; "what dark mystery is this? Who could have been fiendish enough to have poisoned the claws of this terrible brute, and then turn him loose to make such a beautiful creature his victim? One scratch from those poisoned claws and death in a horrible shape, and almost instantaneous, would follow.

Senor, the Holy Virgin be praised for your timely arrival. But for your steady aim I would ere now have been a mangled corpse," said the musical voice of the girl.

"She does not realize one half of the awful danger from which she has escaped," muttered the young man, turning and facing her.

She had arisen now and stood before him in all her beauty. The young American could not for the life of him help staring at her, as if he had suddenly taken leave of his senses, and in his mind he was saying:

"Am I awake, or have I gone to sleep under the old forest trees, and is this a magic spell the fairies are weaving about me? How wondrously beautiful she is! I never expected to see one half so fair in this Heaven-forsaken region. Ah! she speaks again. Mark the rosy blushes that are creeping up into her cheeks. You are a blockhead, Richard Morton, or acting like a goose."

To tell the truth, the young man could hardly be blamed for the feeling that had gained possession of his senses, for the girl was marvelously beautiful.

The blushes crept up into her face as the painful silence

continued, and she felt, rather than saw the gray eyes of the stranger fastened upon her features.

"Senor, you have saved my life."

This time it was said more calmly, but there was a thrilling vein of feeling underneath the words, and the young man aroused himself.

"I have only done my duty, senorita; what every brave man would have done for a fellow creature. I thank Heaven that I arrived just in the nick of time, for one touch of those claws meant death. The panther is mad."

For some reason he refrained from telling her the other fact, about the panther's poisoned claws, fearing lest the terrible truth would terrify her. Whether this was for the best or not, the future alone could prove.

"You are a stranger here?" she asked.

"I am." Perhaps you can assist me in my search. I am on the way to the hacienda of Don Pablo de Guzman. Know you ought of him in this locality?"

"I will take you to him, and he can thank you, noble stranger, much better than I for saving his daughter's life. I am Inez de Guzman."

"Indeed!"

The other started, and looked at her closely, while some hidden emotion seemed to be moving his features, for his mustache twitched nervously. He readily accepted her escort to the hacienda, and after regaining his horse, started off at her side. All the time, even while conversing with her gaily, he was thinking to himself:

"Who could have attempted to murder this beautiful creature in such a terrible manner?"

Ah! Richard Morton, you will soon find yourself entangled in a network of dark mysteries and still darker deeds, of which this is but a commencement.

CHAPTER II.

ROARING RALPH'S MYSTERIOUS MISSION.

"Trousers and tomcats! what hev we hyar?"

The exclamation fell from the lips of a grizzled forest ranger, who had come to a sudden pause, and with rifle thrown forward, peered through the dense shrubbery beyond.

He was a veteran of the prairies, and his buckskin suit had seen such long service that it actually shone with grease in places. His iron-gray hair hung far down over his shoulders in waves, and his beard was at least a foot long.

"Fiddles and frying-pans," he continued to mutter, "thar's some deviltry afoot yonder. Tar and feather me, it seems as if adventures lie in wait for this chile wherever he goes, but then thar's no use in growlin', fur t'war love o' adventure and sumpen else that brought me hyar. Crawlers and catamounts! I reckon a closer view would be more agreeable, and if thar's any fun goin' on count this chicken in every time, Mister Mexes. It's me that sez it, Roaring Ralph Rockwood, you bet!"

The man was none other than the veteran scout and Indian fighter, whose name has since become so famous in connection with Custer's ill-fated crusade and the Sioux war.

What under Heaven our old friend was doing away down in Lower California, at the pearl fisheries, the reader will find out in the course of the narrative, but I can promise that while Roaring Ralph is upon the stage there will be no lack of amazing adventures and episodes, for the old fellow always had a peculiar knack of stumbling into hornet's nests, and had never known what it was to fear any one.

As he gave vent to his favorite expression, Roaring Ralph moved forward, still peering through the bushes as if what he saw beyond interested him greatly.

It was late in the afternoon.

Already the dusky shadows were stealing from their coverts and a gathering for a final rush that would effectually extinguish the last remaining gleams of daylight, and they looked like somber ghosts, stealing about the forest.

A magic spell rests upon nature in these latitudes at the closing hour of day; something indefinable seems to render the air mellow, and the fragrance of myriads of flowers is wafted to the senses of the person who chances to be in the chaparral or on the prairie.

Roaring Ralph had probably seen more adventures in his time than any two men upon the border together, but this was not because he failed to be cautious.

To see him making his way through the chaparral, one would think it was a snake for all the noise that followed his gliding movements. His eyes were glued upon some scene in the thickets beyond, and it seemed as though the sight almost transfixed him, for he never once removed his gaze, even to glance casually around him, as might have been expected.

"Bar claws and buffler hoofs! I reckon there's more deviltry afoot in these regions than a feller can well manage. Wharfore air them fellers got that painter, and what air they doin' to his claws? Chaw my old breeches fur soup if this don't lay everything out flat. I reckon I'll circumnavigate them critters an' see w'at's w'at."

Roaring Ralph now exercised more caution and drew closer to where the little scene was transpiring that had attracted his vision. It was, indeed, a peculiar sight, and one well worthy of exciting curiosity.

Three men could be seen. Two of these were broad-shouldered Mexicans, the third a hunchback whose greatest charm consisted of the fact that he was the champion ugly man in the world. One glimpse of his glaring red eyes, long, hawked nose and terrific ears and mouth would be enough to send the bravest child into convulsions, for, put a pair of horns upon the wretch, and human nature could not conceive of a more able likeness to the Old Nick, which name had been given to him years before on account of the fancied resemblance.

The sight of this terrible creature gave the prairie ranger quite a start, and he felt a shiver run up his back.

"May I be chawed up by an alligator and roasted on ther end o' a two-pronged pitchfork, if that ain't Satan hisself. I reckon he are come arter Roaring Ralph. Wall, if he kin git him, he are welcome to ther ole critter. Whitewash and whale-bones! w'at in the foul fiend are them critters a doin'?"

It might have puzzled a wiser man than our old ranger friend to have guessed this enigma. The animal that he termed a "painter" lay upon the ground as if dead, a bloody foam showing in the corners of its mouth.

Old Nick was bending over it and engaged with its claws, which the other two men held up for him.

Ralph Rockwood could hardly keep his curiosity within bounds, as he gazed upon this strangest of all strange sights.

"Sauerkraut and soup bones!" he ejaculated, in a whisper; "stitch me up fur a cross-legged tailor if I can make head or tail o' this matter. W'at do they want to cut ther toe nails o' a dead painter fur? Roaring Ralph, if you don't find out w'at this means ye ain't the man I take ye fur."

Eagerly he watched the actions of the strange trio. In another minute he had made the discovery that instead of paring the claws of the animal, the hunchback was placing some substance upon them, and after this was done the men handled the panther's feet with the greatest of care.

"Mustangs and Mexicans! what do it all mean?" muttered Ralph, in amazement.

The task, whatever it was, seemed to be ended, for the hunchback dropped the piece of bark that had contained the

substance with which he was rubbing the claws of the animal, and uttered some quick, sharp words.

Even Roaring Ralph, from his place of concealment, could see that the creature no longer appeared to be dead, but gave several spasmodic kicks, as if returning to life after having been rendered senseless for some time, either through a blow or some drug, probably the latter.

The two men made haste to obey the commands of the horrible hunchback. A large leather bag was brought into view, and then the animal was, with some difficulty shoved into this until only his head protruded.

Some care was taken to secure the mouth of the sack properly around his neck, and all this while Roaring Ralph was staring as if he had gone crazy himself.

"Bullets and bayonets!" he muttered, as he surveyed this strange spectacle, "it looks fur all ther world like a pet baby. Wonder if they're goin' to make a present to some leddy."

He little suspected how near the actual truth he was and that there was a lady in the case.

At another command from the hunchback, the two men raised the bag and its contents, and the trio vanished in the gloomy aisles of the forest.

When he was certain that they had gone, Roaring Ralph left his covert and approached the spot. He was very much like a woman in his curiosity, and had been known to rush into the most terrible danger because he had made up his mind to discover the meaning of something that worried him.

In the present instance he could hardly be blamed, for there was something so strange about the actions of the three men that any person would have had their curiosity aroused.

Reaching the spot where they had stood, he looked around him until his eyes rested upon the piece of bark used by the hunchback. This he picked up and examined.

There was a little of the substance used by the hunchback still clinging to the bark. It was of a greenish color, and had a most peculiar odor.

No sooner had the old ranger got a whiff of this strange scent than he started, and gazed upon the piece of bark with mingled amazement and horror.

"Dust my Sunday breeches!" he at length howled in a shrill whisper; "ther plot thickens, and now I'm sure thar's some villainy afloat. The rankest pizen az war ever made. Don't I know it well? Will I ever forgit poor Davy Moore's fate down near Monterey? We done our best fur him, but an angel would have found it hard to have saved him arter that pizen had entered his veins. Anyhow, we gave his murderer a dose o' the same stuff, that stretched him out stiff in less than ten minutes.

"The question now are, w'at are them critters up to? Is ther going to be a bull fight round here, and have they pizened the painter's claws so they kin bet on him and win? It beats all natur what deviltry these Mexicans are up to, anyhow. I never did like a greaser, nohow, and fur some things I hate 'em like thunder. I ain't afraid to tell 'em so, neither, and it's me that sez it, Roaring Ralph Sedunk Rockwood, you bet!"

The prairie-ranger stood leaning upon his rifle in a meditative manner, as if trying to solve the mystery that had been enacted before his eyes. He could not believe in the explanation he himself had offered, for the trio had been too villainous-looking, and such was the spirit in which he held all Mexicans that he could believe the worst of them. Then there must be a deeper, darker scheme in view, something that threatened human life.

While he stood thus, something fell from the leafy canopy overhead, and the noose of a lasso dropped over his shoulders. Before Roaring Ralph, usually so quick in such an exigency,

could do aught to save himself, there was a rushing noise, and up he shot like a rocket.

Two men, who had been concealed in the tree, had lassoed him, and then springing down had, by their combined weight, jerked him up, for the lasso was not long enough to reach the limb twice.

The jerk and strain had been anything but pleasant, but this was not the worst of it, as the prairie ranger understood, when, looking down, he recognized in one of the dark-faced men, Red Carlos, the guerrilla and smuggler, who was intimately connected with the hunter's mysterious journey to Lower California.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAIL OF VENGEANCE.

Facing the ocean, and situated upon an elevation that might almost be called a crag, such was its height above the surrounding country, stood a large stone house.

It was brought into greater prominence by the fact of its possessing two stories, while the houses in the vicinity never arose beyond the conventional one-story of earthquake Mexico, and were, moreover, built of adobes.

From the spot where the mansion stood, one could survey the sea for miles around, and with the afternoon sun glancing over the surface, ruffled by a gentle wind, it presented a grandly glorious spectacle.

At the foot of the rocks was a strip of beach, and here the long rollers spent themselves, chasing each other in frolicsome impetuosity over the sand.

Scattered thickly, as far as the eye could reach over the unbroken expanse of blue water, could be seen the many boats engaged in gathering oysters.

Their method of doing this differed widely from that in vogue along the Atlantic coast, for the pearl oysters are scattered more than their eastern relatives, and, moreover, lie in deep water.

A boat contains three men, the diver and his two assistants. The former goes down, taking with him a bag or basket in which to place the oysters he may find, and after hastily filling it, comes up once more.

Then, in the evening, the spoil is divided if the boat is a co-operative one, one share for the owner, one for the government, and the remainder for the workers.

Pearl diving is oft-times dangerous, for sharks are plenty, and unless the diver knows his business, he will be apt to come up minus his head. A small, pointed stick is carried, which is used to detach the oysters from the rocks to which they cling. The diver also possesses a keen knife.

Many of them are daring fellows, and upon seeing a shark above, waiting for them to come nearer the surface, will gratify him in an unexpected way, and, before he knows it, thrust their keen knife into his bowels.

Others allow the shark to turn over, and, just as he is about to seize them, thrust the stick, pointed at both ends, between his jaws, thus effectually disarming him, for he cannot shut his mouth, and, being helpless he is then killed at the pleasure of his enemy.

The perils of pearl divers are many, and, as a class, they are a most daring, resolute set of men. One may find all nationalities among them, from the negro to the Caucasian. The most expert, however, as a class, are said to be Kanakers, but they are such ill-natured fellows, and ready for revenge at the least provocation, that this counteracts their efficiency.

It is a place for wild romance.

The very balmy sea-breeze seems to contain untold stories of mystery as it fans the cheek, and the golden rays of the setting sun, just dipping into the watery waste far away on

the western horizon, light up a picture such as no other place on this terrestrial ball could equal for grandeur and picturesqueness.

The boats are returning now after a long day's work, and the sparkling water dripped from the upraised oar-blades like diamonds. Now and then the breeze brings the sound of some boatman's song.

All are heading for the shore, and it can be noticed that fully one half of the boats will land at the strip of beach under the rocks on which stands the stone house.

Two men await them here.

One is a dark-faced little fellow with the long black hair of a Mexican. He is a government official, waiting to receive the third that comes to him as the tax.

His companion is a tall, finely formed and extraordinarily handsome man. He wears a very large mustache that droops down on either side, and is of a light, tawny hue. It gives him a striking appearance. Now and then a shadow flits across his face and changes it very much, but whether the shadow is one of sorrow or evil, none but a close observer could tell.

This is Donald Dare, the Pearl Prince, who owns fully one half of all the boats employed in the fishery. Who he is, beyond this fact, the ignorant people who live in the vicinity cannot say.

He had come there years before, built the stone house, had furniture brought around the Horn on a vessel from New York, gradually employed boat after boat, until, if the whole number were counted up, it would be found that he owned the majority.

He was a stern, quiet man, who knew enough to keep his own secrets. During the years he had been interested in the pearl fisheries, he had been known to get hundreds of costly pearls as the master's share, but not one of these had been sold to the agents of foreign firms, who kept shops in the village, and drove splendid bargains with the divers and their assistants.

The boats now draw near the shore, and the little government official becomes excited, for it is really a game of chance to all concerned, and as his pay comes out of his share, he is naturally interested deeply.

As soon as the boats land, their contents are divided into three piles—one for the government official, a second for the owner, and the third for the men. These latter carry off their spoil to eagerly search it for treasures, finding perhaps nothing, perhaps a prize.

The officer has his share bundled into carts and carried away, while the same is done for the large pile of the Pearl Prince. When the oysters have become decayed in the sun, they are washed out and the pearls found. Of course, many of these are inferior, but now and then a rare gem is met with.

All the boats are now in, and, turning, the Pearl Prince walks up the steep path that leads to his house. The sun has vanished, and even now the shades of night are swooping down to enfold the scene, for the twilights in this country are delightfully short when compared to our long northern ones, and the magic half hour between sunset and dark is something that can never be forgotten by any one who has experienced its strange influence.

Lights appeared in the stone house, showing that there was life there. In a front room sat the Pearl Prince. The evening had grown chilly, and a fire sparkled in the grate before which the man sat, occasionally sending out a wreath of white smoke as he held the finely flavored segar to his mouth.

Whatever he was thinking of, his thoughts seemed to trouble him, for he moved uneasily, and several times a low word escaped his lips. Was it a haunting conscience that

worried the man, or simply some trouble that had come to him, as it does to all?

From this fit of meditation he was aroused by a knock upon the door, and then a half-breed servant looked cautiously in, informing his master that some one wished to see him on particular business.

The Pearl Prince was accustomed to having visitors at all hours, but they generally were compelled to trust to luck and circumstances for an interview, for if he felt indisposed in the least, he had the privilege of all great men and could decline seeing the one who called.

On this particular evening, however, he was glad of the chance for driving away his thoughts, and ordered the half-breed to show the visitor in.

A minute later a young man entered, the same whom we have seen before, the hero of the scene in the chaparral which came very near being a horrible tragedy.

The firelight failed to show his features plainly, but the Pearl Prince could see in the one keen glance he gave at the other's features, that he was an American.

There was nothing surprising in this, however, for upon the pearl coast one would naturally expect to find many daring spirits from the States. Some wanderer, destitute of money, perhaps, who sought employment.

So reasoned the Pearl Prince.

"Good evening, sir," said the young man.

"The same to you," returned the magnate.

"I understand that you are Donald Dare, of Boston."

"Whoever told you so spoke the truth, although I seldom hear the name here. Who are you, young man?" in a careless manner.

"Richard Morton!"

The words had hardly left the boy's lips—for he was not much over twenty-one, although he did boast of a glorious mustache—when the Pearl Prince turned very white and seemed to gasp for breath.

He uttered no sound, however, and by a desperate effort calmed himself, but his eyes glittered strangely as he leaned forward and stared into the face of his visitor, whom he had never seen before, but whose features were very familiar to him, now that he saw them plainly.

"Well, Mr. Richard Morton, what would you have with me? Is there any business to be transacted between us?"

"There is a little business between us, Mr. Dare. I have come some distance partly to see you. You were a passenger on the ill-fated Evening Star. My father was last seen in your company. How did he die?"

"Who told you that, lied!" cried the other.

"Not so. You and Captain Morton were left on the vessel; you by mistake, he because there was not room in the boats. What became of him and the secret he carried in his belt?"

Eye flashed into eye.

That of the Pearl Prince did not quail, but it wavered a little.

"He went down with the ship; I providentially found a rude raft and was saved," he said.

"That differs from the truth. Donald Dare, what did you with my father's secret? He lies in his watery grave; by whose hand was his death hastened? Speak! I am here for vengeance!"

The two men once more glared into each other's faces like a couple of Bengal tigers.

CHAPTER IV.

A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA.

Richard Morton had faced the wild panther and the grizzly bear without flinching, and he now met the glare of the eyes opposed to him with a steadiness that nothing could swerve.

The Pearl Prince was moved by many emotions, chief among which were anger and fear.

There was something in the young man's stern eye that struck him as terrible. Perhaps a guilty conscience had something to do with it, for they say "guilt makes cowards of us all."

His natural boldness came to his assistance, however, and he quickly overcame the feeling that had threatened to overpower him.

"Young man," said he, sternly, "I know not what you mean. Charlie Morton and I were friends. None mourned his death more than I. Who put such a foolish notion in your mind? They left us on the sinking ship. The boats and every one of the crew were lost. Out of all I was the only one saved, and who is it dares to accuse me of doing your father a wrong?"

There was a triumphant vein in the man's voice, as though he was conscious of his power and gloried in it. Richard Morton put his hand inside his coat.

"A voice from the grave accuses you, Donald Dare. Some months ago while I walked along the shore, not many miles from San Francisco, there washed up to my feet a bottle."

A low curse fell from the lips of the Pearl Prince at this point, and had Morton possessed ears keen enough he might have heard him mutter:

"Fiends take it! I broke the wrong one, then!"

"Without realizing what an influence it had upon my future and yours, I mechanically picked it up. It was sealed over, and yet appeared to be empty. This naturally excited my curiosity, and I hastened to break it.

"Inside I found a tiny piece of paper, with the writing so blurred that it was only by the aid of a magnifying glass I made out the message. Then I discovered that it was meant for me, and this is the purport of it, as near as I could make out."

As the young man spoke he drew out a piece of paper, yellow and marked by the ravages of time, for it had been in the bottle for years, and Heaven alone knows how many hundreds of miles that bottle had traveled upon the bosom of the mighty Pacific before it was cast so providentially at the feet of the very man for whom it was intended.

"I am Captain Charlie Morton, of the good ship Evening Star. She foundered off the coast of Lower California, on September 16, 1851. All lost but myself and Donald Dare. I am weak from a blow received during the storm by a falling timber, and unable to protect myself. He is armed and strong. Already has he stolen the belt containing my money and the secret. I fear he means me ill, and I write this so that if I am never heard from again, my son may seek this man out. I put it in a bottle and seal it. To-morrow, if I live, I shall write another. We are on a large raft, drifting. Donald is sleeping. Send this to Richard Morton, Boston Highlands, Mass. No. — Dudley street."

The young man looked up.

He saw the features of the Pearl Prince working convulsively, as though the man was tempted to throttle him on the spot, and was only deterred from doing so by the physique of the captain's son.

Once more eye flashed into eye.

This time it was the Pearl Prince who showed the furious anger, while young Morton appeared as stern and cool as an avenging Nemesis.

"What did you do with my father, Donald Dare?" he asked, slowly.

The other almost foamed at the mouth.

"Curse you!" he cried, "I tell you Captain Morton went down with his ship. We made the raft between us, but he failed to get upon it when the ship went to pieces."

"You forget this letter," said Morton.

"I can only account for that in one of two ways. It is either the work of some enemy of mine, or else Captain Morton, in his crazy mood, wrote it while we were still on the vessel. He says himself he was badly hurt by a timber during the storm.

"We were on the Evening Star about two days before she broke up, and during that time the captain had several crazy fits. I did my best to save him, but he was obstinate, and in his sane moods declared his intention of going down with the ship. He was too brave, too devoted to his company."

The Pearl Prince spoke eagerly, as if he had decided upon a line of policy and was bent upon following it up.

Young Morton looked at him steadily, and the manner in which he despised the man could be seen in his furious glances. There was also contempt in his gaze.

"There are many things for you to prove, Donald Dare, before I could believe you innocent of my father's murder. I have taken the trouble to telegraph to a detective in Boston, and have him hunt up your ancestry. He easily discovered that you started on that ill-fated journey to California actually penniless; that you did not own enough to more than half pay your passage, and that it was only through the kindness of my father that you were enabled to go at all.

"When you were saved you came here, and in less than half a year had built this house, and owned many of the boats in the pearl fishery. There lies the first mystery—where did you get the money from to do all this?

"Secondly, you never explained the blood marks on the raft when you were rescued. Was that the life blood of my father?

"Thirdly, and lastly, I found duplicate papers of his secret, at home, but some one had been to the place before me. Donald Dare, I know not whether you murdered my father or not, but this I am sure, you robbed him of his treasure, and it has been the foundation of your great success here.

"Ay, frown as you will, I fear you not. Here, in your own castle, I brave you to your face, and fling my defiance in your teeth. Start not, Donald Dare, and mutter curses. Fortune has smiled on you long enough; now she must make way for retribution and justice.

"Ha! man, would'st draw on me. Another movement like that and you are a dead man. Do I look like one to be baffled by trifles? If you provoked me, I would just as readily send a bullet through your craven heart, as through that of a running deer. Think not to frighten me by looks. I am a Yankee, an untamed spirit on the path of vengeance.

"I leave you now, leave you in the midst of splendor bought by my father's money, and paid for by his life, but do not flatter yourself that I will not return. Sooner shall the eternal rocks fly from their beds than I from my purpose. You will see me again, Donald Dare, and, in the meantime, rest assured that I am watching over you, that every hour passed but strengthens the net that has you in its meshes."

Richard Morton was gone.

Even while the Pearl Prince stood and glared like a baffled fiend, one hand in his pocket where it rested upon the weapon he dared not draw, the young man and his leveled revolver had vanished as if they were swallowed up in space. Donald Dare knew full well that his enemy had simply stepped out of the room, for he heard footfalls in the hall, and then the door closed with a bang, telling that young Morton was gone.

Then the full rage of the Pearl Prince broke out. He stormed and cursed until the very air threatened to turn a yellowish blue, and smell of burning brimstone.

Realizing, presently, that there could no good come of such an exhibition of temper, he grew calm just as suddenly, and then set his brain to work planning and plotting.

"I'll do it the first thing in the morning as sure as I live.

The cursed young hound shall rue the day he ever threatened Donald Dare. Ha! who can that be?"

As he spoke there was a ring at the door, for the Pearl Prince boasted of a door-bell, a commodity almost as scarce in Lower California as in the Republic of Mexico.

A minute later and the door of the room was pushed open, and a man entered. He was of medium size, and powerful physique, each limb looking like banded steel.

His head was set firmly between his shoulders, and his face was a most singular one. It was destitute of hair and the skin was browned by exposure. His eyes were jet black as was also his hair.

Donald Dare recognized him at once as one of the pearl divers, the most celebrated on the whole coast. He gloried in killing sharks, and had long been known as Hercules, the shark-slayer. There was much more about the man than Donald Dare had thought before.

"To what do I owe the honor of this visit?" he asked, as the man shut the door after him.

"I don't know that there's any honor about it, but you owe it to circumstances," returned the shark-slayer, calmly.

"Don't be impudent, fellow."

The Pearl Prince was in a bad humor, which could not be wondered at, considering what he had just gone through. However, the other seemed in nowise put out by his reception.

"I am in your employ, Mr. Dare, but do not insult me. I take an insult from no man, be he king or commoner. I have come here to-night to tell you several things. In the first place, you may be somewhat surprised to learn that I was a seaman on board the ill-fated Evening Star, the only one saved besides yourself."

The Pearl Prince could not repress a slight start at this information.

"I knew there must have been one man saved, for the story was known that we two had been left on the wreck, I by mistake, the captain through a mistaken notion of right and principle. What have you to tell me?"

Something that will astonish you as it did me; perhaps alarm, confound you as it did not me. The years have passed since that night when in the howling wind and raging sea we pushed away from the Evening Star, and left the captain and you to your fate.

"We had no help for it; the captain ordered us to so so, and we had no alternative but to obey, for the boats would not hold another man.

"I enthroned Captain Morton in my mind then as a king of men, a hero whom any one would have been proud to worship. Ever since I have remembered the last glimpse I had of him standing there so brave and calm, with his arms folded across his breast, and night and day his last words have rung in my ears: 'Save yourselves, lads, there is no room for me; I will go down with the old ship.'

"Perhaps as long as I live I shall remember the hours that we were swept onward over the raging waters, the terror of the moment when we found ourselves thrown into the surf, and left to battle for life against the cruel rocks and surging billows.

"Do not grow impatient; I will be brief, and do you gather your energies, for you will need them all. I was thrown senseless and well-nigh lifeless upon the coast miles below here, after battling with the fierce waters until as weak as a child. Not another man was saved but I.

"I have known who you were all along, but did not care to make myself known from judicious reasons. Now, however, something has occurred which renders such a course necessary, and I have come to you. I have made a startling discovery, in which you are interested as well as I, as it concerns the wreck of the Evening Star and Captain Morton."

"A discovery, you say! Come, man, do not keep me waiting. What discovery could you make this late day?"

There was much more in the manner of the Pearl Prince than one would expect in a man totally innocent of any crime. His face was pale, and his skin seemed drawn over his bones, while his eyes appeared to be chained upon the shark-slayer, and dilated with horror until they showed the white circles.

Altogether the man looked like one hunted by the dead past. Hercules eyed him in disdain for half a minute before making reply to the man's question.

"The discovery I have made is one that pleases me, but which will confound you. Every soul was supposed to have been lost on the ill-fated Evening Star, but I have made the startling discovery that Captain Charlie Morton lives!"

CHAPTER V.

LEFT HANGING IN THE CHAPARRAL.

When Roaring Ralph found himself elevated so suddenly and dexterously, he was naturally a trifle confused.

The abrupt shock, the strain on his body, and, above all, the rapidity of his ascent to the aerial regions, were quite enough in all conscience's sake to flusterate him.

Besides, as if this were not enough, he looked down and recognized a bitter enemy in one of the two men who had captured him so neatly.

Red Carlos was known throughout all Mexico and the border as an unscrupulous villain, and no deed of rapine and plunder was too bloody to ascribe to his hand.

A year previous he had vanished from his usual haunts, which was considered surprising, but he had a good reason for thus vanishing.

When the places which once knew him, knew him no longer, it was supposed that the desperado had been killed in some foray either against the whites or Indians, for he seemed to be at war with every one, and had passed an eventful life upon the border.

That the man below him was Red Carlos, the smuggler and guerilla, there could be no doubt, for his features were well known to the ranger of the Colorado canyon, and besides, if any doubt existed on the subject, all that was necessary was to glance at his right hand.

This was a livid red color from wrist to the end of his fingers, and had been so since his birth. From this peculiarity he had gained the name of Red Carlos when he was yet a boy, and it was not much later that he baptized the scarlet hand in the blood of his first victim.

The boy outlaw gathered around him a band of equally desperate characters, and their daring deeds on the border have seldom been equaled. He was a bosom friend of Cortina, the general who has kept Northern Mexico in a ferment for years with his band of revolutionists, cut-throats and horse-thieves.

Red Carlos was intimately connected with the mission of Roaring Ralph to this country. They knew each other well, and a bitter feud existed between the two that would never die out until one or both of them were laid beneath the daisies.

It would have been much wiser in the guerilla had he raised his gun and shot the dangling man, for Roaring Ralph was as slippery as an eel, and had never been in a tight place yet but what he found a loophole of escape.

The guerilla knew this as well as any man, but, having the ranger in his power, he could not forbear leaving him to torture and almost certain death.

As the rope had fallen over his arms and strapped them down to his sides Roaring Ralph's position was far from

being a painless one, but he was a man who could suffer the agonies of the Inquisition without a murmur.

"Carramba! see the dog hang. What, ho! my fine fellow, how do you like your dance on nothing? That is what overtakes all the enemies of Red Carlos. I once warned you what would be your fate, and, lo! there you are, like a bird of Paradise. Carajo! isn't he a beauty, comrades?" and the guerilla laughed hoarsely.

"Dust my Sunday breeches!" half howled the ranger, who was capable of great excitement under any such circumstances, "don't you go to thinkin' this air ther end o' it, greaser. I've been in many a worse pickle than this, an' still Roaring Ralph has lived to tell ther tale. Grunters and grub-grinders! don't ye go bettin' too high on yer chances ag'in mine."

The Mexican smiled scornfully, for the chances of the ranger seemed about one in a thousand for escape, and he was willing to risk that much on him.

One of his men, the fellow with him, whom he called El Coyote, felt more uneasy, for he had seen something of Roaring Ralph before. He begged his chief to allow him the opportunity of putting a bullet through the body of the ranger, and thus wipe out all the old scores that lay unsettled between them; but Red Carlos was as stubborn as a donkey when once he had set his mind on anything, and refused to grant the desired privilege.

As Roaring Ralph's rifle was a home-made affair, the guerillas cared not to carry it away, and hence it was left where the ranger could keep his eyes up to it, for by this means his torture would be increased, as the cunning Red Carlos well knew.

Bidding the dangling ranger a mocking farewell, the two men left the spot, and Roaring Ralph was left to solitude, swinging to and fro like the pendulum of an ancient Dutch clock.

His position was far from pleasant; any one can acknowledge that, even without experience in that direction.

So Ralph thought himself as he felt the cruel rope cutting deeper into his arms with each passing minute.

"Take my head fur a cocynut if I don't git even with ye fur this. I call it a nice pickle, I do, and shoot me fur a greaser if I see how I'm to git out."

Sure enough the outlook was not very encouraging on this score. He had no comrades roaming the chaparral, and his shouts would in all probability only bring other cruel enemies to the spot with more ingenuity for fiendish cruelty than Red Carlos, who would riddle him with bullets and then leave him to die.

Roaring Ralph twisted his head and looked around him. All at once his brain gave birth to an idea that promised some little hope of ultimate escape, and he lost no time in putting it into execution.

It was easy for him, with his legs free, to increase the pendulum motion, so that in a very short time he was swinging wildly to and fro.

Did the ranger expect to break the rope?

If so he was grievously mistaken, for it was a rawhide, capable of holding a dozen men of his caliber.

It chanced, however, that his ideas ran in another direction.

Several times, in swinging forward, he had struck against the limb of a tree, and all at once, when his motion was more violent than it had yet been, he suddenly clasped his legs about the limb.

It was hard work to support his body in this singular position, and still more difficult to move along the limb, but Roaring Ralph was a man of rare nerve and determination, and capable of carrying out his plans if it lay within human possibility.

Inch by inch he made his way along the stout limb, and this movement was gradually allowing him to hang more perpendicularly, for the limb grew toward him.

A few minutes more and the work was done. Roaring Ralph made an effort, spread out his arms, the loop of the rawhide lasso fell over his head, and so far as bonds were concerned he was free, though hanging head downwards from a tree.

Not for long did the ranger remain in this position. Twisting himself up he suddenly allowed his legs to leave their tenacious hold upon the limb, and, turning a half somersault as he fell, landed upon his feet.

The Colorado ranger's arms were so sore that he could hardly move them, but this was a small matter when he realized how close he had been to a terrible death. There was something about the ingenuity of his escape that tickled Roaring Ralph immensely, and he chuckled and wheezed over it all the time he was securing his powder-horn and rifle.

Before leaving the spot he managed to take down the rawhide rope, and wrapped it around his waist, intending when the chance occurred to give Red Carlos the benefit of it.

Roaring Ralph had scarcely plunged into the bushes when he heard some one making toward him, and at once secreted himself. In less than a minute's time a man came to a pause close by, and half-raising his gun, peered through the bushes.

Then a cry of dismay escaped his lips, as he saw that the swinging man no longer hung from the limb. A chuckle behind him—El Coyote turned to find himself face to face with the object of his solicitude.

CHAPTER VI.

"THERE IS NO FURY LIKE A WOMAN SCORNEO."

Richard Morton, after leaving the stone house, descended the slight elevation, and made his way toward the hacienda of Don Pablo de Guzman.

Although not so palatial as the house that overlooked the sea, the Spaniard's residence was large, and fitted up as elegantly as it ever entered the mind of a Mexican to furnish his home. The recent quarrel with the Pearl Prince had excited the young man in no small degree, and wild thoughts were running riot in his mind as he walked through the darkness.

Reaching the don's hacienda at last, he entered, sure of a warm welcome there, for the senorita had told the story of what happened to her in the chaparral in her own way, and the Spaniard had in his thankfulness showered his expressions upon the young man.

Knowing as he did that there was some dark mystery hanging about that terrible deed in the chaparral, where the jaguar with poison on his nails had been let loose upon the beautiful young girl, Richard kept his eyes about him, determined to see for himself what it all meant.

He dared not say a word of the matter to the don, for he was fiery-tempered in the first place, and would in his fury proclaim it abroad while searching for the culprit.

This was just what the American did not want done, until he had a chance to look over the ground and make his calculations as to whom the dastard was.

If once he could find him Heaven help the wretch, for he would have no mercy on him, and was ready to pay back that which had come so near being meted out to Senorita Inez in the chaparral.

The young girl loved him passionately; that was potent to even the dotting eyes of the don, but he was warm-hearted and thought it but just that to her preserver Inez should give her maiden heart.

He liked the young man exceedingly himself, and had found a chance to draw him into a conversation about his family,

which redounded to the credit of Richard Morton, who came of good English stock.

The black eyes of the senorita followed him everywhere, and melted into liquid sunbeams at his approach. They told of deep, unalterable love, and Richard's heart thrilled as he considered the happiness in store for him.

He had also loved her at first sight, and these two, so strangely brought together, seemed fated to be all in all to each other.

Other eyes noted the little drama that was being enacted, a pair of orbs as black as those of the young girl. It was her cousin, Don Raphael Barcelona.

He had long regarded the young senorita with envious eyes, longing to make her his own, and had deemed himself in high favor before the arrival of the young American.

When he saw how matters were working the bitterest rage filled the mind of Don Raphael, and his love burst into such a tremendous passion that it threatened to smother him.

He could have seen Richard torn to pieces before his very eyes, for stepping in between him and the girl he idolized, and no torture would be too great in his mind for the interloper.

He was careful, however, to hide his feelings when the others were around, as he did not wish either the senorita or her father to realize how he hated Richard so that in case anything happened to the American suspicion would not fall upon him.

When alone, or in the presence of Richard, he allowed this passion to distort his face until it resembled that of a fiend, and the American knew that he had made an implacable enemy by his coming to the pearl coast.

Light-hearted, gallant and brave, he was ready to laugh at such a danger, but he had already seen to what terrible ends the hatred of these hot-blooded Mexicans could go, and he had sense enough to be vigilant.

Don Raphael was beyond all suspicion in regard to being the author of the outrage in the chaparral, for no man who loved a girl as madly as he did Inez would ever think of murdering her in such a fearful manner.

Richard kept his eyes well about him in regard to this mystery, even while he was going about his work of vengeance.

On this night, as he was returning from his walk along the coast, and the interview with the Pearl Prince, he heard a murmur of voices just beyond. He was on Don Guzman's place, and not over a hundred yards from the hacienda.

Richard had no intention of eavesdropping, but when a man hears his own name spoken he is supposed to take some interest in the conversation.

The persons—whoever they might prove to be—were advancing toward him, and all that was necessary to enable him to hear what they had to say about Richard Morton was for him to remain perfectly quiet and lean up against a tree of some caliber that grew near.

To his surprise the first voice he heard was that of a woman and the other—surely he was familiar with the tones—yes, it was certainly Don Raphael.

"Who is this Senor Morton of whom you speak, amigo?" asked the woman.

"An interloper; a Yenggee who has come down here to spoil all my well-cooked plans with his cursed face; but he shall not triumph long, for I shall kill him!" hissed the enraged voice of Senorita Inez' cousin.

"Then I shall kill you," came in the quiet but thrilling tones of the woman.

They were now within a few yards of where Richard stood, and he could see their forms plainly. As his own was so blended with the tree against which he leaned that nothing could distinguish them, they were not aware of his presence.

Even the concealed man started at the astonishing words of the woman; as for Senor Raphael, he came to an abrupt pause, and drawing a long breath of amazement, leaned forward to peer into his companion's face.

"Demonio! then you love him, Carlota, you whose love is plighted to me!" he cried.

"No, I hate him as I hate every Yengee; still, I say, if you harm a hair of his head I shall kill you!" she made answer.

"Carramba! what means this? You are pleased to speak in riddles," cried the man.

"There need be no secret between us, amigo. You have plighted your love to me, and promised to wed me. Think you how I will brook a rival?" and her voice now trembled with anger.

"A rival?" repeated the man, and Morton could trace pretended surprise in his voice, and also anger.

"Ay, do not think me a fool, senor. The whole country is talking of it, and saying what a fine match it would be for you to wed your cousin Inez. I have been near you in the chaparral, when you walked together, and heard you speak soft words in her ear, such as you said were only for me."

"Perdido!"

"Ay, and more. I could see the love in your face, shining from your eyes, in every motion of your arm, as it thrilled you to feel the touch of her hand. You love her, you dare not deny it!"

She seemed to await some reply, but he was silent, and to her silence meant consent.

"That is why you hate the Yengee. I, too, have cause to hate him, but I say again his life shall be safe from the assassin, for your cousin loves him, and she shall have him."

"Carramba! it is false!"

"It is true, amigo. I had thought to thwart you in another way, but this is best after all. Your cousin loves him and he her. They will brook no interference, nor will I."

"You! ha-ha! you have brought the truth home to me now, and I may as well confess it. My heart has gone out to my cousin; I intend to make her my wife, and neither the Yengee nor you can prevent my carrying out my designs."

"You defy me, then?" she asked.

"There is no defiance about it, girl. I am tired of you, and I turn my heart to my cousin. Go you and seek some new lover. Take this cursed Yengee, and if he ever proves false put a tarantula upon him as he sleeps.

"As to your threats, that for them," snapping his finger; "I care naught for what you say. They tell us 'There is no fury like a woman scorned,' but they lie, for an angry man can crush a woman; so beware, girl!"

"Beware of what? Your anger? It has never frightened me yet, why should it now? It is you who should beware."

"Of what? Your hate? Bah, a love-sick girl is as harmless as a centipede under the heel of a boot. I laugh at it," said the man.

The girl was now the furious one.

"Listen!" she hissed, "and see who is your enemy. You think I am harmless to do you an injury. When a Spanish girl hates, there is nothing to which she would not stoop for revenge."

"I hated the senorita because you loved her, and I thought she returned your love. I do not hate her now, because I have discovered the truth, and that she looks down upon you."

"Carajo!" growled the man.

"Hush! her throat!" went on the girl, without heeding the man's cry. "I resolved that she should die. It was through her that I learned the truth about you. You had been captured and tortured until you were mad. Be-

sides this, my tools poisoned his claws, so that a touch would have been death."

"Sanctissima!" cried the horrified Mexican.

"But for that Yengee she would have died the death. Beware, Don Raphael! my love has turned to hate now, as bitter as the tarantula's sting."

He reached out his hand to grasp her, but with a mocking laugh she fled and vanished.

"Cospita! she is a fiend," he muttered, "but I will destroy her plans by carrying Inez away, and killing this cursed Yengee coward."

A touch on the arm broke in upon his muttered soliloquy, and turning, he found himself face to face with the hated American, with death shining from his eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHARK-SLAYER'S SECRET.

"I have made the startling discovery that Captain Charlie Morton lives!"

When Hercules, the shark-slayer, had uttered these words in his terrible base voice, there was presented a scene that would have thrilled an artist who loved astounding situations.

While he spoke the man had, perhaps unconsciously, assumed the attitude of accusing Fate, and with one foot advanced, his face flaming with the terrible accusation, and his right hand pointed solemnly at the other, he appeared to give additional emphasis to the astonishing words which he uttered.

As for the Pearl Prince, he was quite demoralized.

While the shark-slayer had been speaking he had bent over, listening eagerly for the revelations that were to come, but no sooner had the startling denouement fallen from the lips of his comrade than the Pearl Prince uttered a low cry of mingled horror and dismay, and started back.

Upon his pale face there played for a minute those two great passions, fear and fury. The skin seemed to be drawn like parchment over his bones, and was almost yellow in its hue.

Only for a minute, however, did this last, and then the Pearl Prince began to rapidly recover his senses.

The double expression on his countenance began to give way to unbelief, and even a smile of incredulity appeared. He found his voice, which, though strained at first, quickly regained its power as the man's strange, fierce nature asserted itself.

"You have told me something astonishing, and I find it hard work to believe it. Some one has deceived you, for when I look back and remember how Captain Morton went down amid the roar of that awful tempest, I am as sure of the fact of his death as I am that you are now before me. What evidence have you, Hercules, to substantiate your announcement?"

There was a wild gleam in the eyes of the Pearl Prince as he spoke. Perhaps he remembered the lonely boat with its two occupants; perhaps he remembered how he crept upon the weak captain during the darkness of night and, striking him with a billet of wood, threw him overboard, after securing the precious belt.

If these distinct memories came into the mind of the Pearl Prince, it was no wonder that the abrupt announcement of the shark-slayer had startled him.

The other smiled at his words.

"There is the best evidence of what I affirm."

As he spoke he held out his hand toward the Pearl Prince, exhibiting a piece of wood, which the other had seen him holding during the interview, but had not paid any particular attention to.

Now, as he took it into his hand and the light of the lamp fell upon it, he made the discovery that upon both sides there were engraved letters. The work had been finely executed, probably with a penknife, and the action of the waves in its travel of months had given it a peculiar, blurred appearance; still the characters could be plainly traced.

This was what the astounded villain read upon the wood:

"March about the 13th, 1872. May Heaven have mercy upon me and cause this little bark to float into the hands of some one who will act a friend's part. I am Captain Charlie Morton of the good ship Evening Star. We were wrecked three years ago on the Sunken Rocks. The crew left in the boats. Myself and one other, a man named Donald Dare, tried to save ourselves on a raft, and for days we floated at the mercy of wind and wave.

"One night he struck me on the head, robbed me, and threw me overboard. I recovered my senses in the water and clung to a floating spar. The next day a storm came up, and, stunned and bleeding, I was thrown upon this island, where I have been ever since, leading a Robinson Crusoe life. As near as I can judge, with my rude calculations, it is in the latitude of the City of Mexico. Pray Heaven I may yet be rescued from this living grave to visit my vengeance upon the man who robbed and would have murdered me. Amen."

When he had read this most singular letter, written on both sides of the flat piece of wood, the Pearl Prince uttered a cry like the snarl of a savage beast, and springing forward, he placed the thing upon the fire.

"It's an infamous lie!" he cried, in a passion; "the act of a madman, or the trick of a fool, I care not which. Lie there and burn, you wretched thing."

The fire was small, and before the flames had a chance to seize upon the wood that had traveled so far during these six months, the shark-slayer had sprung forward, and snatched it from their reach.

"Fiends take it, man, would you dare defy me?" cried the Pearl Prince.

As he spoke, he put his hand behind him, and it was plainly evident that he meant to pull out the little deadly revolver he always carried with him. Just then he found the blazing eyes of the shark-slayer fastened upon him, and realized that Hercules was ready to spring upon him with the speed of a lightning flash.

Once in the grasp of those terrible arms, he would be as helpless as an infant. None knew this better than the Pearl Prince, for had he not seen the shark-slayer pounce upon a man who was deemed a giant in size and power, and with the strength of a demon, lift the man far above his head and hurl him a dozen yards away?

No four men along the coast dared assault Hercules without weapons, such was the fear inspired by his terrible power.

"Be careful, Donald Dare, unless you would brave death, for if you draw a weapon upon me, I shall not hesitate to strike, and woe unto you then."

The shark-slayer uttered these words calmly, but there was a menace in his very tones, which the other could not but understand.

He withdrew his hand without making a further attempt to get at his hidden revolver.

"Let us have a truce between us while we talk. You hold there an ugly weapon, which, false or true, might put me in a bad light with my neighbors. I am sure there is a plot against me of some kind, but I do not think that you are other than an innocent person in it. That story was circulated to do me harm, and I have little doubt but that the witness you have brought was prepared for the same purpose by an enemy of mine. Tell me where you picked it up?"

"It came from Thunder Reef. I was passing there a few

hours ago, when I saw something peculiar circling around in the eddy we call the whirlpool; it was this piece of wood. A stout stick was stuck in this hole, which flaunted a little piece of red flannel. Underneath was fastened a stone, to keep it right side up. That is all there is to tell. What can you say to the accusation brought against you, Donald Dare? I loved Captain Morton, as all the men did. I have revered his memory, for he was a brave and kind officer. I shall never forget the last I saw of him.

"The other boat had gone, and ours would barely hold one more. You were down below and not seen. The captain stood there, and beside him a poor, weak devil, far gone in consumption, whose life was hardly worth saving, at any rate. We called to the captain and pleaded with him to enter.

"He looked around him, smiled bravely, picked up the half dead saller, placed him in the noose, and lowered him into the boat; then cutting the rope, he cried: 'I shall go down with the ship, lads. Good-by!'

"He was a noble man, Donald Dare, and if I felt sure that after all you dealt foully with him, I would have no mercy on you!"

"What do you intend to do? Surely, it will do you no good to circulate this vile story about here. I have enemies, it is true; what rich man has not? But I have also lots of friends, and should there be shown to me any hostility, I would make it warm for those who sought to do me harm. It would be better for you, then, to state at once the price of silence. What value do you place upon yon billet of wood?"

"You are called the Pearl Prince, and I have no doubt well deserve the name, but I tell you all the precious pearls you own could not buy that piece of wood. I mean that it shall hunt you down if you are guilty, and be the means of avenging Captain Morton."

"What would you do?" asked the other, his hand resting on the mantel at a certain spot, while he watched the movements of the other intently, for the shark-slayer was walking slowly to and fro, though keeping his eyes fastened upon his enemy.

"This is what I intend to do. There is a son of Captain Morton living far away in Boston. I shall send him word of my discovery, and when he learns there is a hope of his father's being still alive he will hasten down here, I am sure. Our future actions will be governed by circumstances, but you can rest assured our first care will be for you."

"You are wronging me, man; if Charlie Morton were alive to-day he would tell you it was through no fault of mine he met his death. You heard him say he would go down with the ship. I swear he did go down with it."

"Enough! You know what I mean to do. There is another grievance I have against you, and because of Rachel Staunton I mean to hound you to death!"

A cry broke from the other's lips.

"What was she to you?" he hissed, livid with rage.

"My sister!" came the stern reply.

An oath broke from the lips of the Pearl Prince. He suddenly pressed his hand under the mantel. There was a sharp click, a startled exclamation of horror, a crash, and Hercules, the shark-slayer, vanished from view, while in the floor there appeared a square, black, yawning gulf.

Gazing down into this the man above muttered to himself:

"So perish the enemies of the Pearl Prince!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A DUEL WITH KNIVES.

When Don Raphael felt that hand laid upon his arm, and turning, found himself face to face with the very man whom he had just heard of, he

face either became very pale, or else the starlight was very deceptive.

He started back and uttered an exclamation of surprise that was not unmingled with amazement.

"You here?" he cried.

"As you see, and ready to give you all the satisfaction your black heart demands!" answered the American.

"What mean you?"

"Business. I heard you remark a few minutes since that you were determined upon having Inez for your wife, even if you had to abduct her and put me out of the way. As to the first part of your programme, I advise you to be extremely careful, for it might be dangerous; but surely there can be no danger in disposing of such an American coward as myself. Behold me, senior, at your mercy."

The young American said this in a satirical way that cut the other to the quick, as he knew Morton was making sport of him.

"Demonio!" he growled, "you may yet rue the day, Senor Yengee, when you incurred the displeasure of Raphael Barcelona."

"Silence, dog of a Mexican. We are here alone in the chaparral, rivals for the hand of your Cousin Inez. Both of us are armed. Let us fight it out here. That is surely better than hiring a cowardly assassin to plunge a dagger behind my shoulders."

As Richard Morton spoke he drew his knife, a keen one of the terrible Bowie pattern, which would be well matched against the half knife, half sword machete of the other.

Don Raphael seemed to hesitate.

Then a gleam of savage delight crossed his face, which had erstwhile been as black and gloomy as the lurid thunder-clouds hanging above the horizon. From his eyes there seemed to flash vivid lightnings, as if the fury of his whole soul was concentrating.

"Beware, Yengee, lest you never see the object of your love again," he hissed.

Morton laughed.

"You are terrible in words, but I should like to see you substantiate them in deeds. If you are not a black-hearted craven, Don Raphael, stand up."

This was more than the Mexican could bear. His fiery nature was fully aroused, and his dark face in the dim starlight had the appearance of a fiend's.

"Carajo! your fate be upon your own head, Yengee," he hissed, venomously.

Drawing his machete, he stood for half a minute as if deliberating upon the chances of coming out alive, and what plan of attack he should begin with.

Then, uttering a shrill cry, he sprang forward to the assault with all the ferocity of an enraged jaguar about to leap on its prey in the chaparral.

Richard was startled by the resounding cry which the Mexican had given utterance to. It might have been simply an explosion of rage that had been gathering in his breast during the last few minutes, but the young American could hardly believe this.

In his ears it sounded too much like a signal, as if Don Raphael had companions within hearing distance whom he was signaling to his aid.

This did not worry the young American very much, for he remembered his trusty revolver, and knew that he could defend himself with a chance of coming out victor, unless the enemy proved too numerous.

He met the ferocious attack of the Mexican with a coolness and skill that immediately brought Don Raphael to his senses, and began to show much more careful fighting.

Both men were accomplished swordsmen, and, of course, equally at home with the long knives they handled.

To the Mexican it was almost a second nature. Besides, he had traveled considerably and picked up much sword practice in gay Paris.

As for our gallant hero, Richard had been intimate in Boston with a retired sea-captain, who had once been a noted fencing-master, and they two had frequently employed their evenings by using the foils, so that in the end the young man had learned all the tricks of his friend and become a proficient in the art.

The knives came together with a clash, twisted and squirmed for perhaps half a minute like a couple of snakes; then, as if by a preconcerted signal, both of them sprang back, breathing hard.

They had tried each other's mettle, and found out their respective strength. Richard was surprised to discover such skill in the Mexican, for it equaled his own; but he was not a particle afraid of the termination of the duel, remembering the cunning devices which the fencing-master had taught him, and which he expected to bring into play presently.

Another half minute and they were once more fiercely engaged, foot to foot, and eye flashing into eye. The silvery stars looked down upon the strange spectacle, for the chaparral was open at this point, the trees and bushes being scarce.

Left alone, they would have fought it out, and as the American possessed the most strength and the longest wind, the victory might have been counted in his favor.

Don Raphael was no mean swordsman, however, and he gave Richard all he wanted to attend to, having little tricks of his own that were somewhat cunning.

When the American began to bring his knowledge into full play he proved himself the superior of the Mexican, who slowly gave way before the impetuous attack, and thought only of defense.

It was a retreat, but not yet a rout, for he was capable of defending himself.

Closer the young American pressed his foeman, and now the Mexican began to cast anxious glances over his shoulder, as though making sure of his retreat.

"Ha!"

As the exclamation fell from his lips Richard sprang forward, made a feint and then a quick upward stroke, that was so entirely unlooked for on the part of the Mexican, that his machete flew from his hand, whirling through the air and falling upon the ground a dozen feet away.

Don Raphael did not lose his presence of mind in such a catastrophe, however, for, with a quick movement, he whirled himself away, plunging into the neighboring bushes.

Richard had no time to recover himself sufficiently to either follow or decide upon leaving the Mexican to make his escape, for at the same instant he heard a trampling close at hand, which he had not noticed before, and there suddenly appeared half a dozen of the wildest looking men his eyes had ever beheld.

It did not need a second glance to tell Richard that he was now assailed by the human wolves of the chaparral, for there could be no mistaking their fierce appearance. Upon each bearded and ugly countenance was stamped the word "guerilla" as plainly as nature ever writes upon her work.

There was no time given him for reflection, nor a chance to make good his escape. Whether Don Raphael had drawn these wolves thither with his signal, or they had been naturally attracted by the scent of blood, Robert could not, of course, say, but he naturally inclined toward the former theory as the one more apt to be correct.

No sooner had the men landed in the little arena than, uttering a hoarse cry, they sprang toward the American, who

stood there with his knife held in his hand, breathing hard. Six to one was decidedly unfair, and Richard did not mean to fight it out with his knife alone. He quickly drew his revolver that lay so snugly in his pocket, and then felt himself placed more on equal terms with his fierce antagonists.

Bang! went the little weapon, and with the report the leading guerilla uttered a howl of pain, and fell forward on his face. Nothing daunted by this catastrophe the rest rushed on, eager to impale the rash American on their weapons.

Richard felt no fear so long as he possessed his trusty revolver. A second discharge rent the air, and another guerilla pitched forward. When this second catastrophe occurred the wild wolves were so close to the young man that the powder from his pistol burned the garments of the man whom he slew.

In another instant he found himself in the midst of the remaining cut-throats, and then a general melee took place.

They were now three to one, and the odds certainly in favor of the Mexicans, but these worthies are noted as cowards, and one of them, who had received a pretty severe thrust from Richard's Bowie, turned tail.

When the others saw this worthy crashing through the chaparral as fast as his legs could carry him, they, too, left their quarry, and ran as if the very Old Nick himself were after them, leaving Richard victor of the well-won battlefield.

Knowing the treacherous disposition of the Mexicans, he did not intend remaining long upon the spot, but, selecting his course, made off through the bushes.

No sooner had he gone than Don Raphael crept out of the bushes and surveyed the scene with distended eyes.

"Demonio!" he gritted between his teeth, "what a hurricane this Yankee is; but I will be the death of him yet, so sure as the stars shine."

Will you, valliant Mexican cavalier?

CHAPTER IX.

THE RECKLESS RANGER ON THE RAMPAGE.

The Mexican dog who had retraced his steps in order to put a bullet into the swinging body of old Roaring Ralph Rôk was astonished when he found himself gazing upon the very tree from which the old ranger had been dangling only a few minutes before, and found Ralph missing.

However surprised he may have been, it was nothing to the feeling of dismay that ran through his frame when, upon feeling a hand laid upon his arm, he turned and found himself gazing into the face of the veritable man whom he had come to slay.

Perhaps consternation was a leading trait in the feelings of the man, for he was in a nice pickle.

The stern face of the ranger glowered upon him as though he would kill him with a look.

After what he had suffered at the hands of this man and his comrades, Ralph would have been justified in putting him out of the world without further ceremony, for, not content with leaving him hanging, this man had come back to have his personal vengeance satiated by shooting a defenseless man.

Richard, however, that this was not Roaring Ralph's manner of doing things.

El Coyote may have been a bold man, for his name was known among the border as that of a horse thief and desperado, and he was the son of a gun.

When he saw the face of Roaring Ralph over his shoulder, he knew that he was looking upon a man who would not be taken alive, and he knew that he was looking upon a man who would not be taken alive.

same circumstances, and plunge a knife to his heart without ceremony.

"Neatly trapped, upon my word. Ramrods an' roosters! but ye're a nice lookin' villain for a two-hoss play. I'm the good angel-like, ye know, allers turnin' up when thar don't nobody expect me. Why, we kin hav ther little drama right here, ole hoss. Who knows but what it might turn out ter be a tragedy?"

The alarmed demeanor of the Mexican proclaimed very clearly that he was much afraid of this himself, and his eyes spoke of the feeling of dread that possessed his soul.

Old Ralph remained in this attitude for perhaps a full minute. He was looking into the face of the Mexican with no little amusement.

"Gather me up in a chip-basket, an' fry me over an iceberg, but ye look mighty skeered, greaser. If I ain't mistaken, there's an old score resting atween you an' me, which I would do well, perhaps, to pay off; but it runs ag'in my grain to murder a man in cold blood, an' I reckon ye'll git off this time.

"Jest lay thet rifle in the bushes, whar ye kin git it at some future time, perviding ye live till then, fur I'm going ter make use o' ye."

The Mexican looked Ralph in the eye for a few seconds. What he saw there he never proclaimed, but his action was very suggestive, for he deliberately dropped his gun into the bushes designated by his captor.

It may strike the reader as strange that the fellow, having his gun ready to fire, made no attempt to use it, but to him the reason was very evident. Roaring Ralph's gun was slung upon his back, but in his hand he held a heavy six-shooter, and the Mexican knew of old with what marvelous rapidity the prairie ranger could discharge the six loads, and the terrible effect such an event would be followed by.

His action went toward pacifying the ranger in some degree.

"Wery good, greaser, wery good. I see ye hev some solid sense about ye. It never pays ter fool wid a man o' my caliber, for in the end I'm allers bound ter come out ahead. Sculps an' sausengers! I've an ljee. Don't go ter thinkin' now, greaser, from the fuss I make over it that such a thing are an event in my life, for it ain't; only this here's a grand ljee, an' by ther great horn-spoon, ye're mortally concerned in it, too."

The Mexican looked as if he wished it was not so. It was evident that he did not enjoy the idea of assisting to work out Roaring Ralph's great scheme, whatever it might be, and would only do his share of the matter under protest.

The ranger lost no time, for he was an energetic man, and accustomed to making every second of time account for itself.

First, he stripped the man of every weapon he possessed, and bound his hands behind his back. Then, with the acumen of a lawyer, he proceeded to question him in regard to his comrades, and especially the leader.

The replies of the guerilla seemed to half please the old ranger, upon whose face a sudden determination had formed.

"Git ready to march, El Coyote, fur by the mighty Josh we're goin' whar it'll be hot fur me, I reckon. Dust my Sunday breeches, but I'll show the coyotes what a Colorado ranger kin do."

Roaring Ralph was noted as the most reckless man on the border, and it seemed as though some special providence watched over the old ranger. He had been known to plunge into a whirlpool of danger and death that would have made any man shudder to look at and still come out alive.

He never stopped to think of the danger that he was in, but he never stopped to think of the danger that he was in.

If he felt in one of his venturesome moods, it mattered very little to Roaring Ralph whether there were half a dozen men in front of him or five hundred, he would plunge into them all the same.

This was not the most singular part of it, for some peculiar providence seemed to watch over him, and bring him through perils that it appeared impossible for any one to pass through and live.

There were those among the old man's friends who declared that he must be possessed of an evil spirit, for it was impossible for him to be slain. On the other hand, a few vowed that Roaring Ralph's daring would some day prove his death, for no man could go on long in the manner that he did and live.

So he had become known far and wide as the Reckless Ranger, and there were men, considered bold themselves, who would no sooner think of following in his lead than they would of chasing an engine.

Perhaps the most wonderful feat of the old ranger so far had been enacted in the city of Santa Fe many years previous to the opening of our story, which the reader may be pleased to read in a brief way before following the ranger on his perilous mission, in order to get an idea of what the man was like who would with his quaint humor and thrilling deeds give life and dash to any story of border life.

In some way Roaring Ralph had given mortal offense to a gang of cut-throat greasers who had gained a name on the border that made them the terror of every honest man. He had few friends in the old Mexican town, for the season had not opened for the influx of trappers from the north.

These men did not know Roaring Ralph, as he was rather new in those regions, but it was not long before they found out to their cost that it would have been better to have invited a lion into their midst than he.

A plot was laid to entrap the ranger, and Roaring Ralph fell into it.

He walked into the cabin he was occupying one night and struck a light. As he ignited the rude candle he heard the door slammed shut, and then realized that his house was occupied by some eight of the ugliest desperadoes the sun ever shone upon.

They fully expected that when he found himself gazing upon this circle of deadly foes Roaring Ralph would tremblingly plead for his life, and their amazement may be imagined when the ranger drew his revolver and began deadly work in earnest.

A description of that terrible fight it would be difficult indeed to give. Roaring Ralph emptied his revolver, and then with his Bowie fought like a veritable fiend. Eight to one is fearful odds, and his victory all the more remarkable.

When silence brooded over the cabin of death, and some Americans ventured to break the door down it was a terrible spectacle that presented itself to their gaze.

The entire greaser band of villains had been wiped out, and the author of this wonderful feat, cut and bleeding from every pore, it seemed, lay behind a breastwork of human bones, too weak to rise, but with his rifle, which he had managed to secure in some way, aimed at the door, and had the newcomers presented the appearance of greasers, one of them at least would have paid for rashness with his life.

They took the helpless ranger and cared for him tenderly until he was able to go about, but Roaring Ralph had to leave Santa Fe, for every unkind villain in the vicinity tried to compass his death after his marvelous slaughter.

Then, then, was the terrible man who followed after El Capitan, based on a notion of daring, for he felt in prime condition for some such feat as the Santa Fe job. The action of the guerillas had aroused the lion nature of the old ranger,

and he only desired to find himself among them, and brought at bay, to show what he could do in the way of fighting. He felt as if he held wolf-blood in his veins, which required excitement, or he should go mad.

The guerilla led him faithfully on through the chaparral, and as they advanced the aspect grew wilder. Rocks began to appear, and these increased in size until one could easily believe himself in the region where the gods played at nine-pins and used these mighty boulders for balls.

Knowing that he was approaching danger, Roaring Ralph nerved himself for the ordeal. At last the guerilla came to a halt, and, pointing to a black orifice that looked like the inclined plane of a mining shaft, declared it to be the entrance to the den.

As the ranger peered in he received a sudden fierce push, and like a cannon ball shot down the black chute for some yards, suddenly plunging out into the midst of Red Carlos and his savage followers, and landing upon a rude table around which the guerillas were seated, some drinking and others playing cards. It was a saturnal tableau.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEATH TRAP.

Hercules, the shark-slayer, had expected some treachery on the part of the Pearl Prince.

In the neighborhood, because of his wealth, and the fact that they knew nothing of his past life, the people at least respected the owner of the stone house. There were a few, of course, who suspected that all was not right with the Pearl Prince, but all the foundation they had for their thoughts was that old saying to the effect that any man who lives as if he had never had a past, must have something to conceal.

The shark-slayer had cause enough to hate the Pearl Prince, for years before his sister, whom he had almost worshiped, had mysteriously vanished, and he had searched far and wide for the villain who had abducted her, but without success.

Of late circumstances had arisen that placed him upon the right track, and with almost lightning rapidity he had run his quarry to the ground. This was surely enough to make him hate the Pearl Prince with the venom of a rattlesnake that had been aroused in its mountain retreat, but the discovery in regard to Captain Morton was the last straw that had broken the camel's back, and he could no longer contain within himself the vials of wrath that seemed bubbling over.

He had long known the Pearl Prince, having once been in his employ.

The shark-slayer had gone into the pearl business for himself, and his luck had been extraordinary, for he knew just where the best deposits were. As the sharks were very numerous at these points, other divers had been deterred from working there, but he laughed the danger to scorn, and thought no more of battling with the monsters of the deep than he did of pulling up bucket after bucket of the best pearl oysters.

Knowing the Pearl Prince so well then, he felt sure he would attempt to pollute their truce by some act of treachery. Therefore, he had kept his eyes fastened upon the other's hands, and had the man attempted to draw a revolver again Hercules would have been at his throat like a panther. It chanced, however, that the Pearl Prince was too shrewd for this. He had more ways than one of disposing of an enemy bold enough to invade his house.

The shark-slayer, feeling himself going down, naturally made an effort to clear something as a swimming pool, and to keep himself up in a position that would enable him to fight his way out, but he was too weak, and he was too far from the opening.

He went down with incredible swiftness. How far he fell the shark-slayer knew not, but his outstretched hands came in contact with an iron bar, and he held on with the despair of grim death.

Looking up he saw the open trap and the face of his hated enemy outlined against the white ceiling. Then the words of the Pearl Prince came to his ears:

"So perish the enemies of the Pearl Prince."

After gazing into the terrible darkness for a dozen seconds, Donald Dare withdrew and the trap was closed. Not the faintest light could the hanging man see save a faint streak above where the trap was situated. Around him was the most intense gloom, that could almost be felt, such was its closeness.

It was indeed a desperate situation. The bar was of iron, not over an inch in diameter, so that while it would readily bear his weight, it was anything but pleasant for his hands.

The man was a perfect Hercules, and had been well nicknamed, for he was capable of catching up an ordinary man and hurling him a dozen yards away, such was the immense muscular power of his organization.

He hung there for several minutes in complete silence, but all the while he was considering well his situation. To let go his hold and fall was too risky a business, as he knew not what was beneath him.

Finally he passed hand over hand along the bar until he came in contact with the cold wall. This brought him to a pause, but it was just what he wished, and in another minute he was astride of the bar.

Having in some degree regained his breath, he set about making an observation of his quarters, being of a practical turn of mind. To do this he drew out several matches.

Upon igniting one of these he looked around him, but only the cold rock met his gaze, as the light did not penetrate the darkness beyond a dozen feet. Then he let the match drop, but it instantly went out, and he knew not what was beneath him.

To accomplish this Hercules drew out a wad of cotton, and tacking a second match to it, let the material float downward.

It fell some twenty feet.

The shark-slayer gave a cry of horror as his eyes rested upon the bottom of the pit, for scores of huge spikes, sharpened almost like needles, thrust their ugly noses upward.

Upon these he had been expected to impale himself. The iron bar was doubtless intended to throw the unfortunate devil who descended into this death-pit, head over heels, and give him a whirling motion, so that he would alight in a safe position. At least this was what he concluded, unless the bar was put there to support the building.

No wonder the shark-slayer shuddered as he gazed upon that bristling array of deadly spikes. Providence must have watched over him, for had it not been for his catching upon the iron bar he must even then have been impaled upon the knife-like instruments of torture and death below.

The wall was now torn from the face of the Pearl Prince; he had been unmasked, and in all its hideousness was his treachery, cunning and murderous intentions laid bare.

A dead silence reigned.

No longer were the footsteps of his enemy heard above him, though the light still showed along the crack beside the trap door. How was he to get out of this death-trap?

From around his waist the shark-slayer took a delicate rope. It was some eight yards in length, and seemed hardly thicker than twine, but it was made of horse-hair strands, and would almost surely bear the weight of an ox.

Placing one end of this to the iron bar he let the other drop, and felt sure that it had reached the bottom. It was

an easy task to lower himself down the wall by the aid of this line, and in another minute Hercules was at the bottom of the terrible pit.

The thought had struck him that there must certainly be some means of egress and ingress below, which might not be securely hidden, and if he could only discover it, he could easily make his escape, and cheat the fiendish Pearl Prince of his prey.

When he found himself among the keen-pointed iron stakes, he remained very quiet, fearful lest by a misstep he might be impaled upon the instruments of torture and death.

Taking out a match, he ignited it.

The terrible spikes were almost a foot in length, and securely fastened to heavy pieces of wood that ran across the floor. Hercules bent over and looked keenly, but could discover no traces of blood, so he concluded that there had been no recent victim in the trap, perhaps not any since its formation. Having ascertained this fact to his satisfaction, the shark-slayer proceeded to search for signs of an opening, but his first round of the pit resulted in no discovery, and he realized that he would have to look more closely, as it was evidently hidden.

In order to do so he made his way slowly along, closely examining every foot of the wall.

It was of heavy stone, moist, cold and massive. Any trace that might exist of an opening was so well concealed that his eyes failed to discover it for a long time. He was aided in his search by a billet of wood which he found in the pit, and which was strangely dry.

This he formed into a torch, and saved his matches for a time of need.

All at once the man broke into a low chuckle of satisfaction. His keen eyes had discovered a crack wider than any other, and which extended wholly around what appeared to be a huge block of stone.

Hercules understood that he had indeed found the secret opening, but whether he could make use of it or not depended wholly upon circumstances.

He felt around it for some secret spring, but could find none, for the magic door failed to swing open. Then growing impatient because of his failure to discover the "open sesame," he put his little torch down, and exerting all of his power, pushed against the stone.

Probably no other person could have budged it; but the shark-slayer was a man of extraordinary power, and under his efforts he felt the block of stone slowly moving until he had actually pushed it from its position.

There was left a square opening about a foot and a half in diameter. Through this he hastened to crawl, not having the least idea where it would lead him to, but he felt sure freedom was at the end of it.

Of course, when he had passed through the opening, pushing his little, half-burned torch before him, the passage grew in point of size, and he was soon enabled to stand up.

He found himself in an arched tunnel, to all appearances, though it was evidently between two of the walls of the building. This ran for perhaps twenty-five feet, when he came to a pair of narrow stone steps.

Mounting these, he reached another passage something like the first, at the end of which was a second pair of stairs, only these latter were spiral.

Nothing daunted, the shark-slayer mounted upward, feeling sure that liberty was close at hand, and ready to do and dare anything that he might gain his freedom.

At the end of the stairs was a heavy door. This had several cracks in it, and intending to survey the place beyond before venturing to enter, Hercules extinguished his torch.

Beams of light came through the cracks, illuminating him

that the apartment was lighted, and to one of these narrow openings the shark-slayer immediately glared his eye. He gave a violent start, looked eagerly through the little slit in the door, and then a low, thrilling cry escaped his lips, as if what he saw amazed and overpowered him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN WITH NINE LIVES.

It may be readily believed that the chute through which Roaring Ralph passed with such lightning-like rapidity was not in general use.

The guerillas had a much easier method of entering their den, and this shaft through the rocks was used as a hatch for lowering goods into the place so as to save time in going around.

Sometimes, when the weather became cool, they lighted a fire in the cavern, and the smoke passed up through the chute; but, taken all in all, it was rather clean.

The shaft descended at an angle of about forty-five degrees, so that one can readily believe the ranger shot downwards into the depths with considerable rapidity.

Roaring Ralph had passed through many strange adventures during his eventful life, but never one more strange than this. He had no time to understand his situation, for no sooner had he stooped to peer into the hole than the guerilla gave him a fierce push that sent him forward. Naturally the ranger threw out his arms, so as to take hold of something, but before he could succeed in this he found himself shooting down the funnel like a box from a factory to the wagon waiting beneath.

His rifle lay in the grass near the mouth of the hole, and was not noticed by his enemy, who leaned forward with his head in the chute to ascertain if he could hear what followed.

It took the rough ranger about five seconds to pass through the chute, but the mind is much quicker than action, and he found time to wonder during this period where he was destined for.

He had just about made up his mind that he was bound for the region of eternal fires, when he shot from the chute into the lighted cavern.

There was about eight feet between the roof at this point and the rocky floor.

The table was directly below the spot where he made his entrance.

The guerillas heard the shout of their comrade and the scrambling noise that followed in the chute. Several of them half sprang to their feet, but with only five seconds' time they could not find a chance to utter any expletives.

Probably through the minds of each and every man there darted the conviction that some of their number were about sending a small lot of goods down through the chute, and several pairs of hands were unconsciously put out to receive the burden gently.

When, however, the old ranger shot into view, the guerillas were thunderstricken, and, of course, could do next to nothing as to preventing him from landing on the table.

There was a terrible crash.

Then a scene ensued that could never have been equalled in dramatic force by the imagination of any writer. The table flew over, and the old ranger with it, upsetting some half dozen of the guerillas at the same time, and mixing them up in a heterogeneous mass.

The dozens of spirits were spilled partly over one of the guerillas, and in his endeavor to roll out of the struggling mass of bodies he came upon the lighted candle.

There was a puff, a flash of flame, and with a wild yell the

man leaped to his feet and plunged into a side recess where there was a little pond of water.

When the man on fire had vanished, one of the struggling forms upon the rocky floor sprang to an upright position. It was Roaring Ralph.

"Dust my Sunday breeches!" he yelled, "this hyar air a nice pickle, bowies and butcher-knives ef it ain't."

The amazement of Red Carlos can be better imagined than described. He had left this man in the gloomy chaparral where human being seldom came, with his arms lashed down to his sides and himself hoisted almost among the branches of the trees.

His men were also struck with wonder, those of them who knew the old ranger by sight, for they had been told of the adventure in the forest. Roaring Ralph stood there as big as life with a revolver in his left hand and the ever ready, terrible Bowie in his right.

With the prudent tactics of a wise general, the ranger kept his face toward the foe, and from the look of affairs it was evident that before long there was going to be a commotion in that dim old cavern such as it did not very frequently witness.

Those of the guerillas upon the floor picked themselves up with alacrity, with the exception of one fellow upon whom the upturned table lay. He poked his head out like a turtle peeping from his shell, and prepared to witness what might come to pass.

Red Carlos began to grow furious with rage at the thought of the ranger's outwitting him so nicely. Besides, not having the inside track, he did not know to what he might ascribe this visit of the veteran ranger, and took it for granted that Roaring Ralph, out of sheer bravado, had come down the chute to beard them in their den.

There was some little satisfaction wrapped up in his fury, for, no matter what happened, the chances were ten to one that the American could not find the regular outlet to the place, and that they would have him cooped up until a chance presented itself to slay him.

Roaring Ralph found himself opposed to eleven men, without counting either the fellow above or the one who had vanished in a flash of fire. True, the wretch under the table manifested no desire to leave his quarters at present, which might reduce the strength of the enemy to ten able-bodied men.

As they were all heavily armed, this was, indeed, frightful odds; but Roaring Ralph was in for something desperate, and when his "wolf-blood," as he termed it, was stirred up, he never stopped to count his foes.

Red Carlos had been lost in amazement and anger all of this while, but at length he found time to declare his feelings.

"Carajo! Americano, you possess as many lives as the jaguar. I left you hung up in the chaparral like a scarecrow in a grain field; how come you here?" he asked.

"Bullets and bayonets! that air my business, not yourn. If this ole chicken chooses to take unto hisself a form spiritual, an' glide away on invisible wings through the realms o' eternal bliss, I reckon it ain't no pusson's affair savin' the critter that he descends on. Do ye twig that?" chuckled the reckless old ranger.

The Mexican evidently did not understand what Roaring Ralph was telling about, but certain words gave him a clew, and his face grew bright.

"Cospita, you would intimate that you are a spirit. That is good. My men were getting impatient for another spirit. We had a fellow here some time ago who declared the same thing, and, behold, he turned out a humbug after we had cut his heart out and put it in his mouth. That is a spirit, I say, men. At the same time, you had give him no quarter!"

The last word of the leader was half drowned in the sudden sharp report of a revolver.

Roaring Ralph had fired, and with his usual success, as was testified by the shrill cry that broke from the lips of a doomed wretch, who, throwing up his arms, plunged forward to the floor of the cavern.

This was, indeed, the signal for the commencement of hostilities, and during the next few minutes that old cavern witnessed a scene such as the annals of Lower California had seldom if ever chronicled.

Several shots rang out in rapid succession, and Roaring Ralph narrowly escaped instant death, for one of the bullets touched his long hair before flattening against the stone wall.

On the other side his bullet also struck the wall, but having first passed through the body of an enemy, it was not wasted.

Thus affairs stood when the Mexicans sprang forward to annihilate the American. They were in a good condition to do it, only such a task would prove a difficult feat, as Roaring Ralph seemed watched over by some good spirit.

More furious grew the desperate encounter. Fortunately, all of the men could not get at the old ranger at once, and so agile were his movements that they could hardly aim a blow at him, much less deliver it.

All the while the ranger was making a terrible use of his keen Bowie, and occasionally a shot from his revolver rang out. The fight was not conducted in silence, for each guerilla was giving vent to his choice expletives, while Roaring Ralph uttered his peculiar war-cry as he fought like a man imbued with the strength and determination of a dozen.

A few candles, rudely made from bear's grease, dimly illumined the cavern, and as one or two of these were knocked down during the struggle the place was almost wrapped in darkness.

Talk about your Wild Bills and your Buffalo Bills, there was more recklessness about this old, long-haired Colorado ranger, and more pure daring in his actions, than you would find in a dozen of them.

It would be impossible to do justice to that terrible struggle, for the actions were so rapid in their passage that it was hard to follow them with the eye.

Roaring Ralph did not escape unscathed, you may be sure. The only wonder was that, with all these deadly weapons arrayed against him, he came out alive. It seemed as though a pistol or a knife was ready to assail him at every point, and as the fight went on he received several cuts, while the bullets, fired at such close quarters, appeared to riddle his garments.

It is wonderful how much a man can go through and live. Some human beings actually seem to possess the nine lives of a cat, and it is not impossible to kill them. Roaring Ralph was one of these. Often had he been cut, battered and bruised almost beyond resemblance to a human, but a little recuperation brought him around all right, and then those that dared were compelled to pay the price.

During the course of their struggle, the combatants, now numbering but eight all told, happened to get beneath the door. There was a rumbling noise in this, a subdued shout, and then the form of the guerilla, El Coyote, came sprawling into view, landing in the midst of them. The fun was not yet ended.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MISTAKE OF THE MEXICANS.

It was not El Coyote's fault that this trip through the chute had ended as he predicted it might have proceeded.

He had been used to leading the rangers, and with his head in the clouds he had not seen to what followed. The man

was dreadfully tickled over his cunning trick, and when he heard the sounds of the fracas, he laughed until his whole body shook.

In doing this he disturbed the foundation upon which his hands rested, and, as a consequence, the bandit tumbled headforemost into the chute. He always affirmed that somebody had given him a shove, but whether this was true or false, the fellow shot down the inclined plane like a runaway engine.

As he became wonderfully mixed up in his descent he emerged with arms and legs flying, ending in the very midst of the struggling men. Down went three or four of them, Roaring Ralph among the number.

The old ranger was as sharp as a steel trap. He had quite enough of the fight, if by any possibility he could get out of it; if not, then he stood ready to continue the conflict until he or all of his foes had been sent to kingdom come.

With this idea in his mind, Roaring Ralph was ready to take advantage of the incident. Finding himself upon the rocky floor, he rolled over rapidly half a dozen times, and then getting upon his knees crawled off.

This he was able to do unobserved, for as has been before stated most of the lights in the cavern had been extinguished and a semi-gloom had settled upon the place.

No sooner had El Coyote scrambled to his feet than he found himself furiously assailed by his comrades, and it was not until a knife thrust had passed between his arm and the region of his heart and he had been made the recipient of a half a dozen blows that the wretched man could make them understand who it was they were battering in this vicious manner.

Then the truth became manifest that their foe had escaped them. Such a ferocious set of men the sun seldom shone upon.

Uttering terrible oaths they relighted many of the torches and candles, and sprang hither and thither seeking some traces of the ranger.

Roaring Ralph, when he crawled away from the scene of the conflict, had no knowledge of his whereabouts, or where he was going.

When he came to the wall and found that it was very rough and could easily be scaled, he went up it like a wildcat.

Some twelve or fifteen feet from the bottom he reached a ledge upon which he decided to rest. All the while he was looking to his revolver, and silently charging the empty chambers, the old ranger was indulging in laughter at the expense of the guerillas, who were still pounding El Coyote in the mistaken idea that it was their hated foe.

When they discovered the truth, Roaring Ralph knew that the time for action had come.

From his post of observation the old ranger could see all that transpired and yet remain in concealment himself, for the ledge was hardly reached by the light of the torches.

When he saw the guerillas rushing about as though they were a hive of bees into the midst of whom he had poked a stick Roaring Ralph could not help grinning, even though he realized the desperate nature of his situation.

Nor could he resist the desire to have some fun with them.

The Colorado ranger was a natural ventriloquist, and could deceive the keenest man living in the way of throwing his voice.

All at once, while several of the guerillas were poking about in the dark hole on the other side of the cavern, a loud voice assailed their ears seemingly coming from close beside them.

"Back thar, ye yeller hounds, or I'll let daylight through ye. Back!"

They did start back in dismay to think that they had been so near death. Presently, when their comrades dashed to

their assistance, a rush was made into the dark place by the gallant crowd, led by Red Carlos himself.

Then a peal of scornful laughter echoed and re-echoed through the dim aisles of the cavern, sounding ghostly in the extreme; yet there were not two men among all of those present who thought the movement proceeded from the same place, so that another general search was the result.

Old Ralph was enjoying the circus greatly.

During the next five minutes he sent the guerillas racing like mad from one point to another in chase of an imaginary foe, and with each defeat he rang his spectral laughter in their ears.

The guerillas were fast becoming alarmed, and could not help thinking that the place must be haunted. Roaring Ralph was so far gone in his jollification that he forgot to remain careful, and as a consequence showed his person to one of the Mexicans.

Another minute and the whole band was scaling the wall like so many apes. The guerillas were wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement, and every man of them fairly bubbled with fury that had been thus far suppressed and was ready to effervesce like a bottle of cider that had blown the cork out.

The old ranger's position was now anything but enviable, for, with three human wolves springing up the wall, he was once more compelled to resort to the arbitration of weapons.

No sooner had the first fellow reached the little ledge than old Ralph gave him a blow with the butt end of his heavy revolver that sent him down again faster than he came up.

It seemed a hopeless task, however, for on all sides the guerillas were springing up the wall. Two were already upon the shelf, and others below where the old ranger stood.

They attacked him all at once, two rushing in from each side, and three more climbing over the ledge in time to join in the melee.

For the space of a minute there was a grand rough and tumble contest. Roaring Ralph struck out straight and sent one fellow spinning through the air to the rocky floor beneath, while two more were felled to the ledge.

These latter worthies discreetly remained where they were, and, watching their chance, each seized hold of a leg of the ranger.

Thus encumbered, he was placed under a double disadvantage. In vain he kicked and struggled; they held on like so many barnacles to the bottom of a ship, or leeches to a sick man.

Roaring Ralph still fought on, and made one grand, desperate movement to free himself from the network of foes that encompassed him.

He succeeded in a degree.

The trial, however, came very near being a disastrous one to himself as well as his enemies, for, as they were close to the edge of the shelf, the whole caboodle of them went over with a howl and a crash.

Roaring Ralph was considered a man of luck, for whenever there was a chance of any one coming out first best, he was sure to be that identical individual.

So it was in the present instance.

The whole crowd went tumbling over the ledge with a crash, but Roaring Ralph chanced to alight on top of the others, a fact that amused him very much in spite of his still dangerous position.

Looking to his feet, he found himself face to face with Red Carlos, whose eyes were flashing with mad anger, until they resembled those of the jaguar young Morton had slain in the chaparral, just as it was about to spring upon the young Spanish girl.

The feud between these men was of long standing and bitter

enough in its intensity, so far as Red Carlos was concerned, before the events of the last twelve hours.

With Roaring Ralph it was not quite so venomous, for he generally managed to come out of all their encounters with the best of luck, and therefore could afford to laugh over it. He had business with the guerilla chief just at present, however; business that was apart from his hatred, and this was what had partly brought him to Lower California.

Red Carlos threw himself forward and endeavored to hurl the panting ranger to the rocks, but he found that in Roaring Ralph he had met more than his match. In spite of his recent strenuous exertions, the Colorado ranger was still able to prove himself the same reliable man as of yore, and the guerilla presently found himself convinced of this fact, for he was whirled hither and thither by the veteran prairie ranger.

If Red Carlos had ever been caught in a whirlwind while crossing the deserts of the southwest, he must have been greatly reminded of that event just then, for the hunter twisted and whirled him hither and thither, and finally hurled him into the midst of the men, who were struggling to their feet.

Then Roaring Ralph took to his heels, plunging into the nearest passage, with his enemies close behind him, for these human wolves, once their blood was roused, were veritable fiends.

It happened that this passage was short, and terminated in a yawning gulf. Something seemed to warn the ranger of his danger, and he came to a halt just in the nick of time, for half a dozen more steps would have precipitated him over the edge, when he would have met a terrible death.

On came his pursuers, waving their torches and uttering yells that would have shamed so many demons from the lower regions.

Ralph turned to meet them.

His breath came hard, his eyes flashed, but he was game to the last.

The revolver sounded with a terrible crash in the confined space, and Red Carlos uttered a howl as the bullet pierced his arm, rendering it useless.

Another report and a guerilla pitched upon his face. The revolver was empty. Intuition caused Ralph to thrust it into his belt as he drew his formidable Bowie. Then came the tug of war again.

It could not last, for the old prairie ranger was pretty well tuckered out, and they seven to one.

A blow staggered him and he fell over the edge into the black gulf. With his usual luck he grasped the edge, but one of the men beat his fingers loose. With a last effort the ranger made a move, and then hung suspended over the black gulf holding on with both hands to the guerilla's throat.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SNAKE-CHARMER.

Hercules, the shark-slayer, besides being a man of uncommon strength, possessed a more than ordinary amount of nerve.

This he had proved on many an occasion in times of wreck and peril.

His was the first voice to offer for the lifeboat, and his the steady hand that piloted the craft through the raging billows to the doomed ship, to return, laden down with human beings whom the hungry waves would have claimed but for the timely assistance extended to them.

Storms are of rare occurrence upon the pearl coast, but for that reason more to be dreaded when they do come, for then the usually placid Pacific is lashed by the raging wind into a

perfect whirlpool of seething waters, and woe unto the luckless vessel sailing too close to land at this time.

The shark-slayer had not been upon the coast for more than six months, perhaps less than that, but he had seen several severe storms, with wrecks upon the reefs.

Perhaps the memory of that time when he himself was wrecked came into his mind and filled his heart with sympathy for those in the same condition.

At any rate, he was ever ready to go to their aid and assist to the risk of his life those who were threatened with death.

To all the shark-slayer was a mystery, a veritable Sphinx, even more so than the Pearl Prince, for no one knew aught of him. He came and went, and no one dared question, but to all his life, past and present, except so far as they could see, was unknown.

During his recent adventures he had exhibited the wonderful nerve that characterized all of his actions. The Pearl Prince, deeming him an enemy to be feared, had in his villany sent him down to meet a terrible death.

Through his own exertions, and by the good will of Providence, he had been saved from this frightful death, and was now on his road to freedom.

When he looked through the crack in the partition, and beheld the scene beyond, a low cry had escaped his lips, and he drew back with an exclamation of mingled amazement and horror.

What he saw seemed to paralyze him for a minute. He stood as if turned into a statue, his glance still fastened upon the crack through which he had peered as if glued there.

Thus a minute passed by and then, as if recovering in a degree from the stupor into which he had been thrown, the shark-slayer once more bent forward so that he could peer through the crack.

The apartment beyond was lighted up as if by several lamps or candles. It was some twenty feet square, with three sides of stone, the fourth being composed of the wooden partition.

The place was not empty.

An old man, bent over with age, was seated upon a rude bench. His white hair and beard were matted and tangled, and from his brown face there peered out two sharp black eyes almost like those of a serpent.

His clothing was in rags, and his hands, with their long finger-nails, looked like the talons of a bird of prey.

A peculiar sound had caught the attention of the shark-slayer as he drew near, and this he found, upon peering through the crack, to proceed from the old man himself.

He held a sort of rude lute to his mouth and was rendering soft notes arranged with a most weird, peculiar cadence that seemed to take unto itself something of witchery.

No wonder Hercules was amazed at what he saw. Any man coming thus unexpectedly upon the sight would have been.

Directly in front of the old man was a large serpent of some deadly species, raised erect and motionless, as if by the power of the charmer's lute. It moved hither and thither as if in the dance; softly now came the strange strains and the serpent's motions were sluggish and almost destitute of energy; then suddenly the music changed, its tenor, and as the sharp, shrill notes came forth the reptile increased its gyrating movements until it seemed to be actually growing dizzy, if such a thing could be.

The shark-slayer knew at once that he was looking upon a genuine snake-charmer, for around the apartment could be seen scores of snakes, large and small. Even around the body of the old man they hung in all sorts of poses.

Around his neck, fastened in a knot, was one shining reptile, his head turned around so that the little hooded eyes looked into the charmer's face, and with the snake con-

tinued a little tongue shot in and out of the open mouth, like streaks of vivid lightning.

Another serpent, as thick as a man's arm, was coiled about his waist, with its flat head resting upon his knee, and as the light was reflected from its dazzling scales, one forgot the old man's ragged garments in the glitter and sheen of this terrible living belt.

Around the apartment the snakes glided as the notes of the lute were sounded, for there was something in the music that stirred their natures. There must have been a score of the reptiles in the place, and looking upon the horrible sight, it was little wonder the shark-slayer uttered a cry of amazement and horror.

How was he to get out?

The passage that he had been traversing led directly through this den of vipers, and it barred his way effectually.

The shark-slayer stood watching for some time. He knew who the old man was. His fame had gone out through all the country, and Wild Pedro, the snake-charmer, was well known in the neighboring region.

He was not actually crazy, but because of his love for these strange pets he had been deemed mad by the people, who, superstitious as most of the Mexicans are, felt sure that he must have some affinity in his nature with the serpents that obeyed his commands so implicitly.

He was in the employ of the Pearl Prince, and had initiated him into his secrets so far that he could enter the den with impunity; for should one of the reptiles so far forget itself as to strike him there would no effect come of the blow, for his blood was infected with a powder that was exactly a counter-irritant to the deadly poison.

Even as the shark-slayer looked, the door was pushed open on the opposite side of the den and a man entered whom he recognized as the Pearl Prince, his hated victim.

Hercules, since his descent through the trap and narrow escape from such a horrible death, had felt a terrible loathing for the field who could thus consign any one to such a fate, and as he had many causes to hate the Pearl Prince he was fairly resolved that when the opportunity came he would not spare him.

As he saw the object of his hatred so near to him the shark-slayer unconsciously put his hand to his belt for a weapon of some sort, as if he expected to come in conflict with the man.

The Pearl Prince advanced fearlessly towards the figure of the snake-charmer, unmindful of the hissing reptiles around him. Those upon the person of the necromancer were the most violent, but as the tune upon the lute quickly changed to one soft and entrancing, they seemed charmed to insensibility, for they quickly forgot to dart their tongues in and out like streaks of lightning and passed into a somnolent state.

The Pearl Prince began to speak earnestly to the old man. Hercules could not hear what he was talking about, but from a suggestive gesture or two made towards the spot where he was crouched, he shrewdly judged that the words had some reference to himself, the victim who was supposed to be lying dead or dying in the pit.

Escape in this direction seemed beyond all question impossible, and the mind of the shark-slayer went back.

What was to hinder him from returning to the terrible pit and attempting to reach the floor above?

No sooner had this idea come into his mind than he set about carrying it out. The Pearl Prince evidently had no immediate intention of looking upon his supposed victim. Perhaps he was telling the snake-charmer even then to remove the body from the pit.

Turning, Hercules began to retrace his steps, and having

been over the ground once he had no need of a light until he realized that he was once more within the pit.

Then, striking a match, he found the hanging rope just as he had left it, and climbing up, presently seated himself upon the iron bar. Another match was struck in order that he might survey his surroundings.

On the other occasion he had only given a cursory glance around and above him, as his desire was to go down.

Now he saw that when he stood erect upon the iron bar his hands were within a few feet of the bottom of the floor; a bar, somewhat similar to the one he was upon, ran along from one end to the other, touching the edge of the trap in its passage.

By casting his rope over this he could move himself along the bar until under the trap, and then, pulling himself up, open the trap, providing he could find the spring, which would not be difficult, as he could see a piece of wire connecting with the trap even then, and which was doubtless what the Pearl Prince had used in order to precipitate him through.

Hercules had just managed to get his rope over the bar, and was moving along towards the faint streaks of light that indicated the position of the trap, when his ears caught a sound that made a shudder pass through his whole frame.

Yet it was not a sound repulsive in itself, for one could trace the soft notes of a sweet strain of music. It came from below, and he knew that the snake-charmer's lute produced the sound.

The old man was advancing along the passage, doubtless to carry out some order given him by his master, and that his pets were with him was evident, for they never forsook him nor he them.

Hercules had forgotten to shut the stone below, which was a lucky thing, as he was thus enabled to detect the approach of the fiend the sooner.

He knew what the snake-charmer was capable of doing, and had no desire to be caught in his present situation by the fiend, who, by one cast of his arm, could send a deadly reptile whirling through the air, and, before he could raise a hand to prevent it, the snake would be coiled around his limb, and its deadly fangs buried in his flesh.

Knowing this, then, it was no wonder that the shark-slayer hastened his movements, nor had he a second to lose.

The rope and himself were now directly beneath the closed trap. Looking down he could see a light coming from the open passage that proclaimed the proximity of the snake-charmer.

Three energetic movements of his arms sufficed to take him up the rope, and, hanging to the upper iron bar with one hand, he pulled the wire. As he had expected, the trap fell the instant he touched the wire, and a flood of light came into the dark pit. With the strength of the Farnese Hercules, after whom he was named, the shark-slayer reared his head and shoulders above the trap. At this instant the door of the room was opened, and the Pearl Prince walked unconcernedly in.

CHAPTER XIV.

WAR TO THE KNIFE.

Never was a man more amazed than the Pearl Prince when he saw the head and arms of Hercules, the shark-slayer, protruding from the open trap in the library.

The fire was burning briskly, and besides, there was now a lamp in the room which shed its radiance in every corner.

As he shut the door behind him the eyes of the master fell upon this terrible sight, terrible to him because he had by his own hands not made such a deadly enemy of the fiend.

He had fully believed that the shark-slayer had been

mangled upon the iron spikes in the bottom of the death-trap and had sent the snake-charmer hither not to ascertain whether any life remained, but to make away with the body, for he no more thought of doubting the efficacy of his death-dealing trap than that daylight would come when the night was ended.

His amazement was coupled with consternation, for he had reason to fear the shark-slayer, knowing what he did. It would be almost impossible to picture the feeling that assailed him as he stood there like a statue and stared at the object rising above the floor.

His face was ghastly pale, as if he were looking upon the ghost of a victim, but the Pearl Prince knew very well that the object upon which he gazed was flesh and blood, and this was what made it all the more mysterious and terrible to him; for he was not a believer in ghosts, and never haunted by the spirit of any victim.

How had the shark-slayer escaped the horrible death prepared for him?

Ah! the iron bar.

Like a flash it all came to the mind of the Pearl Prince, and he comprehended how in his efforts to consummate the details of his villainous trap, he had overreached himself for once.

All of this darted through his mind like an inspiration, for it could not have taken more than five seconds.

Hercules, too, had been surprised by the sudden appearance of his hated enemy in the room, while he himself was in such an unenviable situation, but he was not alarmed.

During the few seconds of time that the Pearl Prince stood there, incapable of motion, the other was concentrating his strength for a grand final move.

He knew well enough that in another minute his enemy would have fully recovered, and springing forward have either struck him back into the terrible gulf from which he was emerging, or else have sent a pistol bullet through his head.

One mighty effort of his strong arms and the shark-slayer drew himself out of the hole.

As he did so the other recovered in a degree, for raising his hand he pulled wildly at a tassel which evidently connected with a bell in the servants' quarters.

The trap had closed after Hercules emerged therefrom, being governed by a spring. On the former occasion the Pearl Prince had held it open with his hand while he gazed down into the Cimmerian depths of the pit.

Having signaled so wildly for assistance, the Pearl Prince put his hand to his pocket as if to draw a weapon, when he noticed the shark-slayer bent over as for one of his leaps. Alarmed, the man would have withdrawn his hand, but before he could do so, Hercules sprang forward with the agility of an athlete leaping from a spring-board.

A distance of ten feet separated them, for the room was a very large one, and the Pearl Prince at the extreme end.

The shark-slayer passed through this space like a chamois or a Rocky Mountain goat of the prong horn species. When the owner of the stone house felt the hands of his enemy upon him he gave up all as lost.

Nevertheless, the Pearl Prince was a man of considerable strength and no little courage, and not the one to submit to his fate without a struggle.

The conflict was terrible, though brief.

Much can be crowded in the space of sixty seconds, especially in such a scene as this, where two mad men struggle for the mastery.

They rushed to and fro like two stalwart oaks in the forest shaken by a mighty wind, but neither gave way, for while one fought for vengeance and to satisfy his fury, the other battled for the very life.

Impetuous he had an amazing amount of strength. A man

weak, and almost incapable of standing erect, will show himself the possessor of a giant's power when it comes to the last ditch.

Although the Pearl Prince was not near so strong a man as the Hercules opposed to him, yet the combined circumstances led him to make quite a good fight during that short time.

The shark-slayer was somewhat blown after his recent adventures and exertions, and besides, had not put his whole strength into the contest for reasons of his own.

On the other hand, man never fought more desperately than did the Pearl Prince, for he felt that his life was the stake, and what will not a man do for that—to him—all precious boon?

Thus the minutes passed in a terrible hand-to-hand struggle. The master of the mansion was forced backward until a complete circle of the room had been made, and they were once more in the vicinity of the door.

A wild light now crossed the countenance of the Pearl Prince, for his ears had caught the sound of hurrying foot-falls, and he knew that his brave servants were hastening to the rescue.

Hercules heard the noise also, and knew that the time for prompt action had come. Bending forward, he hissed into the other's ears these words:

"I will come again, dog, and settle with you in reference to Captain Charlie Morton. I am his avenger, and the blood of his murderer shall yet atone for his crime. Lie there, hound."

As the last words left his lips the shark-slayer picked his enemy up as though he was but a mere baby, and before the Pearl Prince could begin to comprehend what was about to happen, and raise a hand to prevent it, he had been hurled to the other side of the room.

Bleeding, stunned and incapable of motion, he lay there and glared at his enemy.

He saw the shark-slayer spring to the door and throw himself against it just as those on the outside tried to open it.

Finding this impossible, the servants tried a new series of tactics, and presently a resounding thump echoed through the house as three or four of them dashed at the door.

This maneuver was repeated.

The strength of the Hercules behind the door would have been equal to that of the wild men, but this was not the intention of the shark-slayer. He was listening intently, resolved to play a neat little trick upon these daring fellows.

All at once he opened the door wide and stood to one side.

The trick was eminently successful, for Hercules had gauged his time so well that just as the men were about to throw themselves against the door.

As a consequence, four men came floundering into the room. Two of them immediately fell to the floor. A third plunged to the left, finally bringing up against the table, which he upset, extinguishing the two candles that had stood upon it, while the fourth could not restrain his momentum until he had rushed to the further end of the room, where he fell over the Pearl Prince, who, when this catastrophe had occurred, had recovered himself so far as to be drawing a revolver with the intention of shooting his enemy.

By luck would have it the flames from the fire died out just at this particular moment, and each one feeling confident that he might have clasped the enemy, they struggled and bit and scratched the other men, recovering from his demoralized state, picked up a candle and ignited it at the stubborn fire.

The true inwardness of the matter was revealed. The Pearl Prince was so amazed to discover that he had been wrestling all this time with his own master, that he could move neither hand nor foot.

Turning a moment of the ship, the Pearl Prince, out of

revenge, incontinently knocked the fellow's head on the floor with savage emphasis, until he became insensible.

Having performed this highly satisfactory work, the Pearl Prince sprang to his feet.

Hercules, the shark-slayer, had vanished, having taken advantage of the excitement within the room. After all his gallant efforts he deserved his freedom if ever man did.

The Pearl Prince was as mad as a hornet. After he had felt so positive that the man was either dead, or, at least, in his power, the shark-slayer had escaped.

This was not the worst of it, for he had carried away the secret with him.

At least, the Pearl Prince was thankful that the trap was shut, so that his servants remained in ignorance of its presence. If he had not wasted so much time, but had gone immediately to the snake-charmer to have him finish the work, Hercules would not have escaped.

Well, he was not safe yet.

There were other wheels money could set in motion, and the fight that was now war to the knife between them would yet assume a different phase. Let the shark-slayer beware!

CHAPTER XV.

THE INFERNAL REGIONS.

Through the dense chaparral a man was making with some difficulty, uttering an impatient exclamation occasionally, as if he were in a bad humor about something.

The morning sunlight found but few means of entering though interstices in the branches, so closely were they knitted above, and in some places what was almost the darkness of evening brooded over the place.

A deadly silence reigned save for the dull hum of insects, or it might be an occasional discordant scream from some bird of prey.

It was a wild scene.

The man had walked for an hour or more, with his surroundings growing more savage at every rod. It was evident that there must be some powerful method in his tramp to take him away so far from the pearl coast.

At length the scenery began to change. The land grew undulating and on each side of him appeared high hills and deep valleys.

His path seemed known to him, however, for he kept straight on, now skirting the base of an elevation, anon walking along the brink of a precipitous bank, beyond which lay a black gulch where a horrible silence reigned.

A flock of vultures flew overhead, making for the mountains, of which this range of hills was but a spur. Upon an old tree a gigantic eagle was perched, uttering shrill screams that were echoed by smaller birds among the trees.

Another mile and the aspect of the country had changed again. Rocks cropped out on all sides now; vegetation was sparse, and the crop of stones seemed growing more plentiful each minute.

Though the country had seemed wild enough to the man before, with the dense chaparral surrounding him and vegetation running riot in every direction, it was nothing to what the landscape now presented to his gaze.

Huge masses of rocks were piled on all sides. The hills seemed to be of stone, the valleys likewise; stones abounded everywhere, large, small and medium-sized. Here was a hill with a gigantic rock on the top and one projecting from each side, that a lively imagination could make out to be the head and arms of a man.

This was a landmark in the vicinity, and Indian tradition told of a god whom they had worshiped in ancient time hav-

ing been turned into stone because of his disobedience to the great sun-god.

The traveler seemed to shape his course by this landmark. Wilder grew the scenery as he advanced deeper into the bowels of this rock country. Now and then a huge fragment, loosened from the top of some hill, would come crashing down, plunging from side to side in its wild passage, probably taking half a dozen lesser stones with it, until at last the whole of them, with a thunderous racket, buried themselves in some neighboring valley.

It was as if the geni of the mountains were playing nine-pins, and one could half imagine the deep, rumbling echoes that lasted for several minutes after the huge stones had buried themselves in the valleys, to be the machinations of these wonderful wizards, making merry over the effect of their last shot.

Still the scenery grew wilder in its grandeur, though one could hardly imagine how that could be; yet the rocks formed archways that led into terrible chasms, black enough to make a man shudder in spite of himself.

All at once the man came to an abrupt pause. A voice hoarse as a fiend from the lower regions had assailed his ears.

"Carramba! my pretty senor, you are riding to death. Do you not know it?" came from a ragged pile of rocks on one side of him.

"What, ho! do you not know me? Come hither, my friend; I have work for you," called the traveler.

"Who is it? The voice recalls pleasant memories and the chink of yellow gold, but the shadow of the rocks shut off your face and I cannot see it. Speak!" came the gruff voice.

"It is the Pearl Prince," fool. Come hither, if thou wouldst fill thy pockets with golden onzas."

A figure made its appearance gliding from the rocks and approaching with a snake-like movement, shuffling one foot ahead of the other.

Such a frightful looking creature never peopled the realms of fancy in her wildest mood. His body and limbs were dreadfully contorted—twisted out of shape, and a large hump arose from his back.

Tremendous long arms, powerful little legs, a head that seemed six sizes too large for his body—this completed his general description.

A pair of huge, dirty ears stood up like those of a rabbit; his unkempt hair was black as jet, and his face—Heaven forbid that word of mine should be used in attempting to describe it. There was the look of a cunning wolf in his shrewd eyes, but after that his countenance was too horribly ugly to resemble beast or human; in fact, it looked like nothing but the face of a fiend from Tophet.

The uncouth wretch was a known character, a sort of outlaw desperado, whom no man dared arrest or fire upon, though he walked through the town itself, for fear of what might follow.

He seldom left the rocks among which he lived, and the man who wandered near his den was apt to fare badly.

This terrible creature was known far and wide as the Toadstool, because of some far-fetched resemblance when he squatted down. At any rate, the name had clung to him like a leech.

The Pearl Prince had once before ordered him for some vile purpose, and the wretch still remembered what a reward he had received.

As he glanced his face assumed a pleased appearance.

"I am glad to see you, senor. My good wife was bearing you from the rocks yesterday, and Wolfangs here was much pleased to see you. Thank you very much, senor, for the thing you have done for me."

As the Toadstool spoke the last and held up the gun he

carried, while with the other he pointed to the animal that followed at his heels.

Wolfangs seemed to be a cross between a dog and a wolf, and—well, without a description, I will venture to assert that in a dog show he would have taken the leather medal as being the ugliest animal on the face of the earth.

They were well mated, the Toadstool and his yellow, mangy cur, but both of them were possessed of a terrible strength that lay unsuspected in their gaunt bodies.

"How now, master mine, what can the poor Toadstool do to gain thy favor?" asked the wretch, in the Mexican tongue, while his dog, with downcast mien, seemed to be inquiring into the same matter.

"I will tell you, Toadstool. Here, take this purse; I am tired carrying it. You will find fifty golden onzas therein. Double that amount shall you receive when you send me the ears of a man I hate with all my soul!" said the Pearl Prince.

The Toadstool held out a frightful claw, and seized upon the purse of gold. This he weighed in his hand for a minute, chuckling audibly the while, and then looked up with a cunning leer.

"Dead or alive, master?" he asked.

"Dead!" replied the other, with an oath.

"Then it shall be done, though he be the generalissimo of the army himself," replied the other.

"Good; I like to hear that talk. Now listen, and I will tell you what I want done. There must be no bungling done here. Kill your man and the money is yours."

"You hate him, then?"

"Hate him?" cried the Pearl Prince, "ay, with a venom as deadly as Pedro's snake poison. He is my enemy. I could see him dragged at the heels of an untamed mustang and enjoy the sight. Yes, you may put it down as certain in the beginning that I hate him, and that any torture you may put him to before killing him will please me the better. Now listen!"

For almost ten minutes they remained together, the Pearl Prince doing most of the talking.

He seemed to loathe the horrible being with whom he dealt, even though he was willing to have him act as his agent. If he thought the deformed wretch did not notice this aversion he was mistaken, for the glittering, snake-like orbs were as keen as diamonds, and although one might laugh at the idea of such a hideous wretch having any sensitiveness, it was the truth. As a general thing it is just such as he who by reason of their being ridiculed are the most keenly alive to such things.

He gave no token of his feeling beyond that strange glitter of his eyes, and the Pearl Prince did not know that he had made his aversion toward touching the wretch manifest.

Having transacted his business he turned and departed with a sigh of relief, for the neighborhood and its associations were anything but pleasant.

The deformed Toadstool remained where the other had left him.

"Within two days, senor, thou shalt have the ears of thine enemy. Send the balance of the money with the messenger," the wretch yelled out after him.

Then he watched his employer until he was out of sight, all the while muttering to himself in a peculiar way, throwing an occasional sentence to his dog as he would a bone.

"Yes, I'll do the work, my master, the Toadstool is ever ready to do a neat job for the pretty golden pets. We'll tear him down—you and me, eh, Wolfangs—and slice his white ears off. Ha—ha! I've seen him before, this gay bird of ours, and even then my hand itched to be at his ears and throat."

Then changing his subject, he continued:

"My master deigns to employ me, but his fingers are too

mighty to touch mine. He looks upon us as if we were brutes—you and I, Wolffangs, possessed of immortal souls. How the Toadstool hates such devils. They think because he is not handsome, forsooth, he knows not what insult means. Some day I intend to show this Pearl Prince what we think of him—you and I, Wolffangs; yes, show your teeth and roll your eyes, dog, for there is work ahead for us, a pretty gentleman to slay, but we must be careful, for he is strong as the unseen giants that leave these rocks down the mountains. Come, my brave Wolffangs, follow, sirrah."

As the uncouth wretch vanished into his den, there was a movement among the rocks. His interview with the Pearl Prince had had a listener.

This listener was no other than Richard Morton. He hunted Hercules up and warned him to be on his guard.

Hercules was so well on his guard that the Toadstool and his dog were dead before night had set in from bullets from Hercules' revolver. The Pearl Prince was foiled again.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FEW SURPRISES.

Roaring Ralph succeeded in escaping from his perilous position at the hands of the guerillas and rescued a captive whom they had, an old man, who turned out to be the missing Captain Charlie Morton.

Then Roaring Ralph, accompanied by Hercules and Captain Morton, appeared before the Pearl Prince in his library, and the latter, on recognizing his supposed victim, disappeared suddenly through a trap-door in the floor and escaped.

Hercules and Roaring Ralph did their best to find the fugitive, but did not succeed.

The next evening Richard called on Inez, and as he was on his way home he was captured by the guerillas and taken a prisoner to the hills. Don Raphael had seen the two lovers together and had set the guerillas on Richard.

The guerillas placed Richard in a hut in the hold-out in the hills, and set a guard over him. But during the night the guard appearing drowsy, Richard leaped upon him. A fierce struggle took place, during which the rotten boards of the floor gave way beneath the struggles of the two combatants, and they fell through the opening into a sort of cellar, some eight or nine feet in depth, that lay under the cabin.

Richard was recaptured again, however.

The guerillas now tied Richard to a tree, and were consulting what they would do with him, when, on again looking toward the tree, they did not see him.

* * * * *

When the Pearl Prince succeeded in escaping from Captain Morton, Roaring Ralph and Hercules, he went to a near-by house in which his servants lived and telling them a story of robbery being committed induced them to return to his house and capture them. They did so, but our friends had taken their departure and were not captured.

When the Pearl Prince realized that his mortal foe, whom he had supposed lay at the bottom of the ocean, or at least remained a prisoner on a lonely island, was close at hand, intent on vengeance, he knew that he must not lose a minute in seeking to destroy him.

First of all, he armed himself both with deadly weapons and a subtle, poisonous poison that would not like made in transforming a man to the dark river of death. He was a desperate man now, and ready to resort to desperate means.

Having finished his work, the Pearl Prince made his way down to the underground passage, where he found the snake-charmer.

He presented a perfect slave to the Pearl Prince. His mind was so controlled by the influence of his master that he

fairly groveled at his feet, and would have given life and all for him.

They conversed in the Spanish tongue for a short time. Then the snake-charmer went through some extravagant motions to indicate his homage towards the other, ending by sinking upon one knee and kissing his foot.

Then the Pearl Prince, with a few parting instructions, left the place.

Half an hour afterwards, a skulking form made its way from the stone house, in the direction of the village. It was the snake-charmer, but so metamorphosed as to be unrecognizable. He no longer carried his pets around his neck, but in his hand was a small, square box, to which he occasionally addressed a few words of command when in a retired spot.

The box contained a snake whose fangs were so poisonous that one touch would result in a terrible death before five minutes had passed.

This it was his intention to deposit in the bed occupied by Captain Morton. The chances were ten to one in favor of its striking him, as the feeble candle-light would not reveal its presence, and being an Indian hooded cobra, the serpent would not give warning before striking like our own gallant and honorable rattlesnake.

There was a tavern in the village, a tumbledown structure, where the guests were only numerous when some gala day occurred, that brought them from all quarters to the little pearl fibre town.

The snake-charmer made his way towards this, and found the tap-room lighted up, for it was after dark.

He was able to look in through the window, and saw a company of half a dozen seated here and there, most of them engaged in smoking.

His eyes glittered venomously when they rested on the sailor, for he recognized him from the description given by the Pearl Prince as the man whom he was to slay.

Roaring Ralph was there, too, and when the snake-charmer saw the herculean shark-slayer, he knew that it would not be well for him to be caught by either of these men in the infamous act he contemplated.

How to discover which room was occupied by the captain was a puzzle, seeing that he dared not show himself in the tap-room, but Pedro was a cunning fellow, and had been liberally supplied with money by his master.

He at once made friends with the hostler, who was a convivial fellow, and who knew him not. They two sat in the back room and discussed the merits of arquadiente, but the snake-charmer filled his comrade's glass as often as it was empty.

When Gomez was under the influence of liquor he was ready to tell everything he knew, but his tongue had a habit of mixing things up in a strange manner, of which freak Pedro was, of course, ignorant.

In a short time he learned that the sea captain slept in the corner room, where he could look out upon the ocean and admire its grandeur.

Gomez, when the pitcher was empty, went out to have it filled, according to the instructions of his comrade, who was to foot the bill.

When he returned, lo and behold, the generous stranger was non est. Gomez stared around him and rubbed his eyes, looked first at the pitcher of liquor and then at the two men on the table, and finally setting down the former, commenced pinching himself to make sure he was not dreaming.

Having satisfied himself by this means, a happy idea struck him. He asked the pitcher of arquadiente to be filled and was about to drain it, when he suddenly remembered that the stranger had only paid for the first one, and that he would be held accountable for both.

He set it down with a look of dismay, and then, as another thought struck him, rushed outside; but there was not a soul in sight.

Returning, what was the amazement of the man to find the dark stranger seated at the table, and calmly pouring out a glass of liquor, while his little box stood close at hand.

Carlos stared. Then his face assumed a cunning expression. Truly the liquor made a fool of the man. He would not let on as though anything was the matter, or else the dark stranger might think he was drunk.

So he seated himself at the table, and the two proceeded to empty the pitcher a second time. When this had been done, Pedro arose, and throwing a gold coin on the table, took his departure, box and all, followed by the good wishes of the hostler, who requested him to call early and often.

Pedro did not go home immediately, for he desired to remain and hear the fun from a distance.

The time went by and he became somewhat impatient. There was still a light in the tap-room of the tavern, but this was no sign the captain had not gone to bed.

Doubts began to creep into the mind of the snake-charmer, such as he had not entertained before. What if the half-drunken hostler had referred him to a room that was vacant, and his work had been for naught? What if the captain should have discovered the cobra before retiring? What if—

His speculations were interrupted by a loud shriek from the direction of the tavern, which was followed by several howls full of terror and agony.

The cobra had struck home!

CHAPTER XVII.

BLOODHOUNDS ON THE TRAIL.

Richard Morton had made up his mind to receive death as calmly as his nature would allow.

The guerillas ere some twenty feet away from the tree around which their guns were resting, and so earnestly engaged in their work, that they did not see the figure that emerged from the dense bushes bordering the stream, and, raising a canteen of water, pour some of the liquid down the barrel of each gun.

No wonder Richard stared.

It was a woman.

It took her but a minute to accomplish her end, and then, making a gesture that was without a doubt meant for help, she once more vanished in the bushes.

A rattle in the bushes behind him told the young man that his would-be savior was near, and he waited for the stroke of the knife that was to make a free man of him.

Still it came not.

The seconds passed into minutes, and yet he saw not the girl, though he felt sure she was close behind him. Oh! Heaven, what suspense, what agony.

Was he to be cheated after all?

Richard groaned in his agony. Then came a whisper not far behind him:

"Come on, American! Carlotta only waits until their attention is drawn to the guns."

Ah, he saw now how cunningly the girl had contrived the affair. She would be seen if she attempted the same now.

Carlotta! where had he heard the name. Ha! it flashed through his mind. This, then, was the girl who had talked with Don Rayback; the girl who had sworn to be his death enemy because of her scorned love, the girl who had let the dark stranger know so that her rival might die the death—the girl who had sworn that he—the American—should have her

aid in marrying him, so that death would be the best vengeance on her false lover.

Richard felt a fierce joy to take possession of him. She was then his friend, and would do much in order that he might be saved. He could forgive her all the past now.

There was no time to think of more, for the marksmen turned to their guns. At their cries of amazement rang out, Richard felt his hand cut by a keen knife, and a hand led him into the bushes.

All was done in a few seconds, and when the guerillas came leaping up to the spot, the two fugitives were speeding away through the darkness. It would be impossible to trail them here, and Richard was all-out with joy.

The girl was not so confident. She knew more of the resources of the guerillas than he.

When they had gone over a mile, Richard saw her stop and listen, while a shade of pallor crossed her face.

"Ha! the worst has come. It is as I feared. The captain has joined them with his hounds, and now, senor, death stares us in the face," she said, coolly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TERRIBLE STRUGGLE.

As the sharp yells of the bloodhounds rang out upon the calm air, Richard felt that mysterious shiver running through his frame again.

"We are lost?" said the woman.

"Not while I have an arm to defend our lives. You have weapons; give them to me," returned the American bravely.

The Mexican girl handed him a small but deadly revolver and a keen dirk, the latter being the same instrument with which she had severed the rope that bound him.

"Let us run on; we shall find a better place to wait for them, perhaps," said Richard.

Turning, they once more ran, although it seemed useless when they were bound to be overtaken in the end. Richard kept up a brave heart and helped his companion on, but both were without any hope of eluding the hounds that pursued them so swiftly.

There were three of them in the pack.

Richard was not altogether unfamiliar with the manners and habits of these fierce animals. When a boy he had spent some months at the plantation of a school friend in Alabama, and had become acquainted there with the tawny brutes used to pursue runaway slaves.

Every ten seconds the sounds of pursuit sounded nearer, louder than before, until the sharp, snoring puffs were not over a hundred yards in their rear.

"Here we must halt."

As Richard spoke, he and the girl ran with unsteady steps across a little open spot, some twenty yards or so in width, and plunged into the bushes on the other side.

A better place for an ambushade could not have been found, and among the bushes they crouched, the girl a little in his rear, and holding in her hand the handle to the revolver she had given him.

They had not long to wait.

Nearer came the discordant cries, then they could hear the noise made by the dogs leaping through the bushes. The cries were close at hand now, and perhaps another minute would decide their fate. There was something terribly solemn in the thought.

Richard held the revolver ready to use in his right hand, and the dirk in the other. His eyes were fixed upon the bushes. Presently he saw a form bounding through the undergrowth, then the bushes parted, and a huge, tawny head

sprang into view, while the yelps of his companions sounded close at hand.

The young American aimed the revolver with a steady hand. There was a sharp report, a puff of smoke, a yelp from the savage brute, and he plunged over upon the ground.

Then came the last and fiercest of the pack. Because of the smoke that was in front of him, and for several other reasons, Richard was unable to follow up his two previous shots with one equally as deadly in this case.

The bullet struck the hound, and seemed to stagger him for a second, but he instantly recovered, and the young man had only time to change the dirk from his left to his right hand when the brute was upon him.

Again and again he plunged the dirk into the fierce brute, but the animal seemed to have a dozen lives. Gradually, but surely, he was pressing the young man back, and it was evident that the hound was aiming for his throat.

All at once Richard's hold gave way, and as they both fell, the huge dog left the arm he had been so vigorously working without effect, and turned to his ultimate object.

Another instant and he would have had the terrible fangs fastened in Richard's throat, but just then a revolver sounded.

It was fired by Carlotta.

Placing her weapon against the body of the huge, tawny brute, she pulled the trigger. The bullet seemed to find a fatal spot, for with the report the animal rolled over, gave a spasmodic kick or two, and then stiffened out in much the same manner as his two comrades.

A body of men dashed through the bushes on the other side of the little opening and rushed toward them. There could be no mistaking them, for at their head were Don Raphael and Red Carlos, the chief of the guerillas.

Richard had no sooner heard the voices than he sprang to his feet, as though an electric shock had gone through him.

His revolver lay on the ground not five feet away, with three of the chambers yet filled, and this he hastily regained. There was no time for deliberation of any sort; the guerillas were too close at hand to permit it.

Crack! went the little weapon in his hand, and a man just back of Don Raphael went down. The report was echoed at his side; Carlotta had fired. Then Richard sent a second shot in among the fierce guerillas, but they were too much worked up to think of giving up tamely when the game was in their hands.

Five more seconds and the score of human hounds would have been upon them, and then all would have been lost. At this instant, however, the clear, ringing report of Roaring Ralph's long rifle sounded close at hand. Help was near!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PEARL PRINCE A FUGITIVE.

The Pearl Prince had sent his trusty man to the tavern to murder Captain Morton, and when the fellow heard that terrible scream, he knew to a certainty that the soldier had been struck as he was about to retire, by the deadly cobra that had been placed in his bed.

It was not his fault, however, that the terrible cobra did not strike the captain, but fate took the matter in hand, and he perished in watching over the man who had lived through so many marvelous adventures.

It seems that Red Carlos could not forget what cause he had to hate both Captain Morton and Roaring Ralph. It worried him exceedingly, and at last he determined to make an effort to get rid of these two men.

A quantity of long knives were readily talked to do the deed. They found out where the two men were putting up,

and as much about them as they possibly could during the day, in much the same manner as Pedro did later—by treating the hostler.

When night came on they crouched in the dark outside, and waited for the time to come when they could get in their work.

At last it was decided to go to work.

It was easy work to climb upon the shed, and from thence into the corner room; still, they used excessive caution for fear of being heard.

Two of them made their way from the corner room into the next one. Those who were left proceeded to hide themselves, so that the sea-captain would not have an inkling of their presence until he had shut the door and was about to retire.

In fumbling around in the dark, one of the would-be assassins struck a small closet in the captain's room in which he hastened to hide himself.

The other, by chance or fate, as the reader may have it, came upon the bed, and at once the brilliant idea entered his head to hide himself under the clothes.

He pulled them down.

The room was not pitch dark, as some rays of light managed to enter from the hall, the door being open.

Upon the white sheet—for the landlord was by descent an American, and carried the customs of his forefathers into this strange land where they do almost everything the opposite to us—the guerilla saw a round, dark, shining object, and without thinking twice, he bent forward to see what on earth it could be.

He found out.

There was a sudden movement of the black object, a shriek from the man, and he staggered back as if drunk, for the terrible cobra had struck him directly in the cheek.

Up the stairs came bounding those who had been sitting in the barroom.

The captain, upon hurrying into his room with a lamp in one hand and a revolver in the other, found one man upon the floor, writhing in the agonies of death, while a second was just passing out of the window.

Without even stopping to think, he sent several shots at the fugitive. There followed a groan or two, and then a heavy object rolled over the roof of the porch and fell with a heavy thud upon the ground.

Just then the captain caught sight of the cobra gliding toward him, and by a well-directed shot from his revolver, he decapitated the terrible reptile.

The wounded guerilla was carried into the tavern. As for the unfortunate fellow who had run against the serpent, he was dying in the most frightful agony.

It was all a mystery to the captain.

By putting the testimony together of his friend Hercules, the sorely-wounded guerilla, who told all he knew when promised life and liberty, and the hostler, it was easy to reach the truth.

Fury entered the hearts of our three good friends when they discovered what a villanous manner the Pearl Prince had chosen in which to execute his vengeance; and it was firmly resolved, in solemn conclave, to hunt the wretch down on the following day, if they were compelled to blow up his stone mansion and himself with it.

When morning came they set about their work.

Captain Morton had found three Americans in a rival pearl-hunting company to that of Donald Dare, who had known him in the long ago, and who, when they heard his story, swore to follow him to vengeance through fire and blood, if need be.

Hercules, the bull shark-slayer, had been quite successful

(Continued on page 26).

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(Continued from page 24).

rebellion in the hearts of some of the Pearl Prince's men, to be ready for an emergency, and four of these men were ready to follow him to the death.

Even Roaring Ralph had his brave retainers, and a comical sight they were. The landlord of the tavern, a fat man weighing not less than three hundred; a tall, slim, melancholy Mexican, who carried his gun as if it were a lead pencil, and a grizzled old reprobate, who for all the world looked like a pirate, but who claimed to be an ancient trapper, one Cinnamon Pete, who had trapped with the old Colorado ranger in the days gone by.

With this combined force, then, did our friends march upon the stone house. The Pearl Prince had heard of the deadly march that was to be made upon him, and, realizing that he could not defend himself against these American foes, and that assistance in such a disorganized country would never come, had hastily buried part of his treasure, and with the balance upon his person taken to the chaparral.

He forgot that the pursuers had among them a human bloodhound in the person of Roaring Ralph, who could follow the trail left by a spirit, so he affirmed, and who glided along the track of the Pearl Prince hour after hour, with quite as much speed as the unfortunate man was making.

They were close on his heels when they came upon the thrilling scene of the young man battling with the tawny hound, and the score of guerillas rushing to the spot.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

When Roaring Ralph's rifle sounded so sharply Don Raphael gave a howl and threw up his arms, for the bullet had found a fatal spot. No sooner had she seen her quondam lover fall than Carlotta Ramos forgot all else, and with thrilling shrieks ran out of the covert and threw herself upon the body.

Meanwhile a volley had been poured into the ranks of the guerillas that mowed down half of their number, and before they could do ought toward escape the followers of the Americans were upon them.

The fight was brief but terribly fierce, for while the assailants were terribly in earnest, those whom they fought were battling for their lives.

Roaring Ralph faced the guerilla chief, and the conflict that raged between them was simply tremendous. Both were armed with knives, and actuated by the emotion of hatred, though Red Carlos had the additional feeling of desperation to spur him on.

The reckless ranger proved too much for the guerilla chief, however, and in a short time the keen Bowie of Roaring Ralph was protruding from his back, where it had been sent by a powerful blow, even while the ranger grasped the knife-arm of his foe with his left hand.

That ended the contest as far as the guerilla was concerned. During this time quite an exciting scene had occurred among the ladies.

The young man, in the midst of the fight, had noticed a form crouching away that looked very much like the Pearl Prince. In truth, he had been hidden away among the bushes when Richard and Carlotta came to halt, and thinking it was his chance, had prepared to follow them.

When he observed how matters stood, the Pearl Prince wisely thought it was time for him to be vanishing the more he so to speak. He followed for the purpose of this movement, Captain Morton, and the rest of his men.

Donald Dare noticed when he heard rattling behind him, and he turned back to see what it was. Finding he was charged by a man, he fired a shot to warn him, and the bullet whizzed by without doing any damage. Before the cap-

ment could be repeated, Captain Morton had sprung upon his enemy and borne him to the ground.

The fight was speedily over, and willing hands seized upon the Pearl Prince. Upon his person Captain Morton found the little casket of jewels of which he had been robbed, and with them pearls of great value, which he appropriated, as Donald Dare had attempted to rob him of that which money could never repay when he threw him overboard into the ocean.

Richard had sunk back almost insensible when he realized that friends were at hand. In the person of Hercules, the shark-slayer, he recognized one with whom he was on friendly footing, but with whom he had never intrusted his name or secret, though tempted to do so.

Carlotta was bending over the slain form of Don Raphael. Although her love seemed to have so turned to hate that she could have slain her false lover with her own hand, yet now that another had done the deed the poor girl's emotions returned with such a shock as to unsettle her mind.

She never recovered. Her one idea was to kill the man who had shot her lover, and it was as much as two men could do to hold her back from Roaring Ralph, who stood with tears in his eyes, so much affected was he by the sight. She had to be shut up until he left the country, and there were those who prophesied that the old ranger had not yet seen the last of Crazy Carlotta.

Captain Morton was called over to dress the several wounds young Richard had received. The amazement, wild joy and satisfaction written on these faces as their eyes met was a sight to behold.

In the happiness that had come upon them they would have let the Pearl Prince go free, but Roaring Ralph and the rest would not think of it. When these latter rejoined Richard and his father, the old ranger did not carry his lasso around his waist, and Donald Dare's fate was easily to be guessed.

Whether the remainder of his riches was ever found can only be guessed at.

When the two Mortons went North Robert took his bride, Inez, with him. Don Pablo accompanied them to see the country, and neither of the New Englanders would ever think of parting with Hercules, the shark slayer.

Roaring Ralph could not be induced to travel on the steam cars, nor did he wait for the wedding, but received a box of the cake and a magnificent Spencer rifle as a token of the esteem Captain Morton held him in. He is at present on his way to Leadville, where we may hear from him again.

The snake-charmer was found dead in his underground house one day; he had perished as he had lived.

When Inez was married she received from the captain a rope of pearls of such magnificence as would have made a queen envy them. They were those the sea-captain had secured as a recompense from the ill-starred Pearl Prince.

Read "OLD DISASTER; OR, THE PERILS OF THE PIONEERS," by An Old Scout, which will be the next number (650) of "Pluck and Luck."

SPECIAL NOTICE. All back numbers of this weekly except the following are in print: 1 to 25, 27, 29 to 36, 38 to 40, 42, 43, 47 to 51, 53 to 55, 57 to 60, 62, 64, 66 to 69, 71 to 73, 75, 81, 84 to 86, 88, 89, 92 to 94, 99, 100, 102, 105, 107, 109, 110, 116, 119, 124 to 126, 132, 140, 143, 163, 166, 171, 179 to 181, 212, 213, 215, 216, 239, 247, 257, 265, 268, 277. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, New York, and you will receive the copies you order by return mail.

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where they are easily gathered up. But this must be done very rapidly before they recover themselves enough to fly. So the skilled catcher, sparing no time to put them at once into the bag, uses both hands to pick them up and tosses them lightly into his apron, where he holds them unharmed till he can hold no more, and only then does he transfer them to the bag. His work lasts till about two o'clock in the morning, when the insects leave the trees for the dewy soil. He then changes his method. He brushes the surface of the ground with a light broom to startle the insects into light; then he gathers them as before. An expert has been known to gather three thousand in one night. Besides being a business, firefly catching is a sport in Japan. Little girls pursue the insects with their fans, boys with wands to which a wisp of yarn is fastened, and they sing an old folk rhyme as they follow the glistening insects. Nor do their elders disdain to join the sport. They organize festival parties to visit certain spots long known and famous to witness the beautiful spectacle of the fireflies swarming. •

There is a little shaggy black-and-tan insect, about an eighth of an inch long, that eats everything under the sun which is not disturbed every day. It has to be surprised at its work like a burglar. In most countries ivory brushes are pretty safe from insects; in Egypt this little terror eats the ivory and eats the bristles; it eats your toothbrush and eats your toothpick; it eats the wool with which you are going to mend your husband's socks—the cards as well as the wool; it eats the handles off your knives and forks; it rejects nothing but glass and china and metal.

A unique record in home building was established in Los Angeles recently when one hundred members of the Woodmen of the World erected a four-room cottage on East Fifty-second street in less than nine hours. From top to bottom, from roof to foundation, front porch, front steps, sewer connection, gas pipes, plumbing and even the painting was completed long before dark and the little house was ready for occupancy. Where in the morning had been a ragged patch of corn and ugly undergrowth by night as cosy a little cottage as one could wish for poked its little red chimney skyward and its doors stood invitingly open. Love and the spirit of brotherhood made possible the seemingly impossible. The house was erected by the Woodmen of the World for their fellow member James Harvey and his mother, Mrs. Margaret Harvey. Harvey is thirty-five years of age. Many years ago he became a member of the order and was a hard working and popular member. Five years ago he was stricken with chronic rheumatism that may make him an invalid for the rest of his life. He has been unable to do any work since. The home is 15 by 34 feet in dimensions, has four rooms and a fully equipped bath, hot and cold water and gas. It is valued at more than \$1,000.

In Japan fireflies are an adjunct to all grades of social festivity from the private garden parties of nobles to an evening at a cheap tea garden. Sometimes they are kept caged, sometimes released in swarms in the presence of guests. To supply this demand there are a number of trained catchers men to catch the fireflies. At sunset the steady hunter starts forth with a long bamboo pole and a bag of mosquito netting. On reaching a suitable growth of willows near water he reaches up by his net and swings the branch back and forth with the insects with his pole. This jars them to the ground.

Ethel—Do you think that George was struck by my beauty?
Clara—I hardly think that he was severely injured.

A jackass is not generally credited with too much wisdom, but he can make a tremendous noise with his mouth.

Country Cousin—What are them things, Tom? Town Cousin—Those are finger-glasses. "What for?" "To rinse your fingers when you've finished eating." "But I don't eat with my fingers."

Mother—Yes, Rupert, the baby was a Christmas present from the angels. Rupert (aged four)—Well, mamma, if we lay him away carefully and don't use him we can give him to somebody else next Christmas.

One day the great chancellor, Lord Eldon, on his way to court, passing a famous beauty, exclaimed, "What a lovely woman!" "What an excellent judge!" was the comment of the lady, who had overheard the remark.

At a children's party one of the matrons, in an effort to supply the wants of a certain group of the little guests, approached a lad who had already consumed some three or four plates of ice cream, not to speak of divers pieces of jelly cake. "May I not offer you some refreshment, Willie?" she asked. Willie's countenance took on an expression of deep regret. "Tank you, ma'am," said he. "I can still chew, but I can't swallow."

Booker T. Washington, head of the Tuskegee Institute, after a visit to the Metropolitan Museum in New York, told this story: "A Kentucky lady," he said, "visited the museum with her maid, an old-fashioned mammy. Mammy had never seen an art gallery before, and the ladies strolled her in a way that would have annoyed her to the heart of Mr. Coney Island. But when she entered the hall of sculpture, then she was more than curious. 'What's this place?' 'That's what?' And with shining eyes at the head she turned before the white beauty of the Venus de Milo. 'Oh, Ap'le B'lo! Ap'le B'lo!' the young lady said and ran. 'That's a piece of ivory carved by 'Lard Sabot!' 'That's just like it, Ma'm! Ma'm!' and she returned. 'Yas'm!' said Mammy. 'Ah, that is well carved. But Ah is worried and dar don't know o' my color kind!'"

TIGER AGAINST BICYCLE

By Paul Braddon.

I was always very fond of bicycling, and from the time I was a small boy, and labored for hours with a bone-shaker, to the day when I became the proud possessor of one of the first bicycles ever made, I reveled in the enchanting pastime, spending hours which should have been otherwise occupied on the back of my iron horse, thus putting my physical powers a long way ahead of my mental. In fact, I hated the sight of a book, and was never happy unless scouring the country on my bicycle. My father was a doctor in a Kentish village, and having a large family he was thankful indeed when, at the age of nineteen, a commission was obtained for me by a wealthy friend in a regiment about to sail for India.

A grand new bicycle was my father's parting present, and that was my delight at finding that another young "sub" in my regiment was also a bicyclist. In these days, when the "iron wheel" has so many votaries, this may seem nothing strange; but to realize my surprise and pleasure you must remember that a bicycle was then a comparative curiosity and a bicyclist a person to be stared at and admired or otherwise. Our bicycles were, I believe, the first ever seen in India; and as we rode together in the town, some days after our arrival, one would have thought it was the triumphal entry of some Eastern potentate.

I could fill a book with the curious incidents and accidents which befell us going "up country." Our regiment was always on the move, and parties of one kind or another were very frequent on our bicycling excursions.

One evening after mess Fred and I signed articles to ride a ten-mile race.

There was a grand native road within a short distance of our camp, running away for ten miles as flat as a drawing board. It lay through the open plain, and then a deserted tract was reached, becoming wilder as the road proceeded, and finally swallowing it up in an impregnable jungle. It was on this road I intended to train. Bent had found a circular path round some native huts a short way from the station, measuring about six laps to the mile, and there he prepared himself for the coming struggle.

After a week of such training as would make a modern athlete's hair stand on end—meat almost raw, chopped very finely; little drinks of neat brandy, etc.—we considered ourselves fit for the contest, and the adventure I am about to relate occurred the evening before the eventful day. I was just starting for a last ride over my favorite course, when an officer stopped me and said:

"Have you heard of the tiger, Harvie?"

"No," I answered.

"The natives have just brought word that some tiger is marked down in the jungle about ten miles from here; so don't go too far this evening."

"All right," I laughed; "I think a tiger would find it a difficult matter to catch me—my training would tell on him."

I had not seen any large wild beasts as yet, and my notion of a tiger was a thin, sleek-looking animal, such as I had once seen in a traveling menagerie. Away I rode, my comrade's caution forgotten before I had gone a mile.

I started at a good pace, but not riding, as I intended to do all I knew coming home. In about an hour I reached my usual halting place, ten miles from the camp; but this being the last night of my training, I made up my mind to ride

another couple of miles, and then do the whole distance back at my best pace.

I rode on, and in another ten minutes found myself in the jungle.

Now for the race home.

Dismounting, I oiled my machine, tightened up every screw, and then sat down on a boulder to rest and enjoy the prospect. A beautiful scene it was, too.

Above me rose the grand mountains, their snowy tops blushing crimson in the setting sun; here a waterfall, like a thread of gold and silver, flashing down the mountain side, and twining in and out among the masses of trees and rocks; there a glimpse of fairyland through a jungle of vista.

A post, or "tank," as they are called, surrounded by dense foliage, festooned by parasitical climbing plants, glowing with flowers of every imaginable hue; humming birds, like fiery gems, flashed hither and thither, darting in and out among the trees. On the "tank" floated water-fowl of every kind, and the banks were alive with grotesque birds, their plumage rivaling the flowers in brilliancy and variety of color. But now the shadows were deepening, the crimson on the mountain tops has disappeared, and the cold snow began to look gray and ghastly. A flying fox went rustling past me, and I hastily prepared to mount; for there is scarcely any twilight in India, and I knew it would soon be dark.

As I rose my eyes encountered something which made me start and nearly drop my bicycle.

There, not forty yards off, was a tiger. I knew the animal well enough; but how different he looked from the lean, half-starved little beast I had seen at home! He had just come into the open space from a dense jungle-brake, and sat there washing his face and purring in a contented sort of way, like a huge cat.

Was I frightened? Not an atom; I had my bicycle and a start of forty yards, so if I could not beat him it was a pity.

He had not seen me yet, and I stood for another minute admiring the handsome creature and then quietly mounted (the tiger was directly on my right, while the road stretched straightaway in front of me). The noise I made roused him; he looked up, and then, after deliberately stretching himself, came leaping with long, graceful bounds over the rank grass and rocks which separated him from the road. He did not seem a bit angry, but evidently wished to get a nearer view of such an extraordinary object.

Forty yards, however, I thought was quite near enough for safety. The tiger was in the road behind me now; so I pulled myself together and began to quicken my pace.

Would he stop disgusted after the first hundred yards and give up the chase, or would he stick to it? I quite hoped he would follow me, and already pictured in my mind the graphic description I would write home of my race with a tiger.

Little did I think what a terrible race it was going to be. I looked behind me. By Jove! he was "sticking to it." I could not judge the distance; but, at any rate, I was not farther from him than when we started. Now for a spurt. I rode the next half mile as hard as I could, but on again looking round found I had not gained a yard.

The tiger was on my track, moving with a long, swinging trot, and going quite as quickly as I was.

For the first time I began to feel anxious, and thought uneasily of the ten long miles which separated me from safety.

However, it was no good thinking now; it was my muscle and iron steed against the brute. I could only do my best and trust in Providence.

Now there was no doubt about the tiger's intentions; his blood was up, and on he came, occasionally giving vent to a roar which made the ground tremble. Another mile had been traversed, and the brute was slowly but surely closing up.

I dashed my pouch to the ground, hoping it would stop him for a few seconds, but he kept steadily on, and I felt it was then grim earnest.

I calculated we must be about seven miles from camp now, and before I could ride another four my pursuer, I knew, must reach me. Oh, the agony of those minutes, which seemed like long hours.

Another mile passed, then another. I could hear him behind me now, pad, pad, pad, quicker and quicked, louder and louder. I turned in my saddle for a moment, and saw there were not twenty yards separating us! How enormous the brute looked, and how terrible! His huge tongue hung out, and the only sound he made was a continual hoarse growl of rage, while his eyes seemed literally to flash fire. It was like some awful nightmare, and with a shudder I bent down over the handles and flew on.

As I now sit quietly in my chair writing, I find it hard to analyze the crowd of memories that went crashing through my brain during that fearful ride. I saw long forgotten events in which I had taken part rise up distinctly before me; and while every muscle was racked with my terrible exertion, my mind was clear, and my life seemed to pass before me like one long panorama.

On, on, on; the slightest slip, I knew, would be fatal; a sudden jolt, a screw giving, and I should be hurled to instant death.

Human strength would not stand much more; the prolonged strain had told upon me, and I felt it would soon be over. My breath came in thick sobs, a mist gathered before my eyes—I was stopping; my legs refused to move, and a thousand fiends seemed to be flitting about me, holding me back, back! A weight like lead was on my chest; I was choking, dying. Then a few moments, which seemed like a lifetime, and then—crash—with a roar like thunder the tiger was on me, and I was crushed to the ground.

Then I heard shots fired, a Babel of men's voices and all was blank.

After many days of unconsciousness and raging fever reason gradually returned, and I learned the particulars of my deliverance.

A party of officers had started with a shikaree (or native hunter) to a trap which had been prepared for the tiger. A goat was tethered on the outskirts of the jungle, and the sportsmen had started to take up positions in the trees near to wait for their game, which the bleat of the goat, in the stillness of the night, would speedily have attracted.

They were talking of our coming bicycle race as they went along, and expecting every moment to meet me on my return journey. As they passed a clump of bushes I came in sight about a quarter of a mile in front of them, whirling along in a cloud of dust which hid my terrible pursuer. They soon, however, saw my awful danger. The huge brute, mad with rage, hurled itself upon me just as we reached them.

My friends stood almost petrified with terror and did not dare to fire; but the shikaree, a man of iron nerve and accustomed to face sudden danger of all kinds in the hunting field, sprang quickly to within a yard of the tiger, and, putting his rifle to the animal's ear, fired twice and blew its brains out just in time to save my life. I was drawn from under the prostrate body of my dead enemy, every one present believing it was all up with me.

Making a horde of benches they carried me into the camp, where I lay for many weeks lingering between life and death.

BURIED TREASURE FOUND.

A soldier returned from Purvis, Miss., says that several days ago a party of five men with a surveying outfit and a

shart of the surrounding country arrived in that place. Their movements were decidedly mysterious, and when questioned as to their business the leader of the party replied that they were members of the United States Geological Survey, who had been sent out by the government to erect stones on the meridian line. This answer satisfied the curious, and no further attention was paid to them.

But facts have been brought to light which show that the party was after a hidden fortune, and that it was successful in its search. Yesterday a brass cannon was found on the banks of Red Creek, nine miles east of Purvis, and on the inside of the cannon are traces of gold. Exactly how much money was procured is, of course, unknown, but from appearances the sum could not have been less than \$20,000. The gun was over six feet long, the bore being about six inches in diameter. The weapon was considerably the worse for rust on account of its long rest in the earth. For years there has been a tradition among the natives about this brass cannon and hidden wealth, but no attention was paid to the stories by the most intelligent portion of the people until the finding of the empty gun on the banks of Red Creek.

This tells the tale, and brings vividly to mind the exploits and crimes of the desperado and outlaw, James Copeland, whose gang of murderers and robbers terrorized the people of three States before the war. Copeland was the leader of one of the most desperate gangs of highwaymen ever recorded in history, who would not spare even the cradle or gray hairs to procure money. What is known as the old Mobile road, running through the pine regions of east Mississippi and southwest Alabama to Mobile, Ala., was the scene of scores of bloody encounters between Copeland and his crowd and citizens who had been to Mobile to market, and were returning with the proceeds of their cotton. Many a lone traveler along that road has been slain, robbed and his body left on the roadside or dumped into some accommodating creek. The end finally came, however, and Copeland was captured and executed at Augusta, the county seat of the adjoining (Perry) county. He made a full and complete confession, which was printed by Sheriff J. R. S. Pitts, now a resident of Waynesboro, Miss., and which implicated some of the most prominent people in Mississippi and in Mobile, Ala.

After the publication of this book the persons mentioned by Copeland in his confession one and all brought suit against Dr. Pitts, which ruined him finally, and came near costing him his life on several occasions. Pitts finally emerged from the avalanche of lawsuits with a whole skin, but a sadder and wiser man.

It was always the policy of Copeland after making a haul to bury his ill-gotten gains in some iron vessel on some section or meridian line. Charts of the localities were always drawn so that the booty could be found easily in after years. During the past ten years a number of instances of this kind have occurred, in which an alleged surveying party has unearthed vessels of gold and silver. A pot of gold was dug from the earth near Meridian, Miss., in 1884, and another in Newton County, and others in Jasper County in 1886 and 1887.

Disinfection of the coaches of the Prussian state railways has been annoying the sanitation authorities, with the result that the Government recently established a system of steel tubes, boiler riveted, into which coaches may be backed and exteriors and interiors rendered germless through a treatment of formalin. Cars are run into these tubes, one at a time, the end of the tube closed, and its interior filled with formalin gas. The car then is set up as a unit in connection with the metal tubing, forcing the disinfecting gases into the tube at short intervals.

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